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SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH

A Dissertation Presented

by

NORMAN L. BARBER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 2002

School of Education

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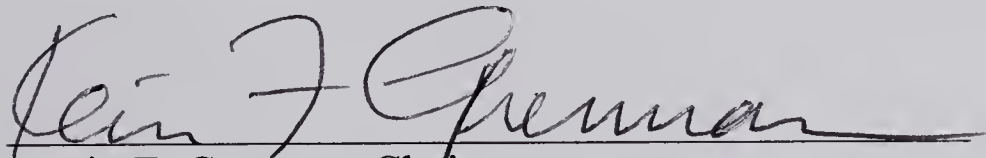
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Approved as to style and content by:



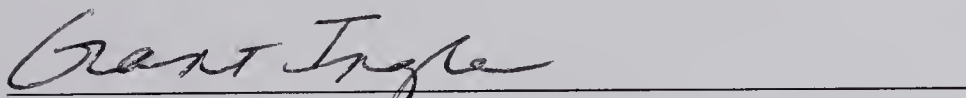
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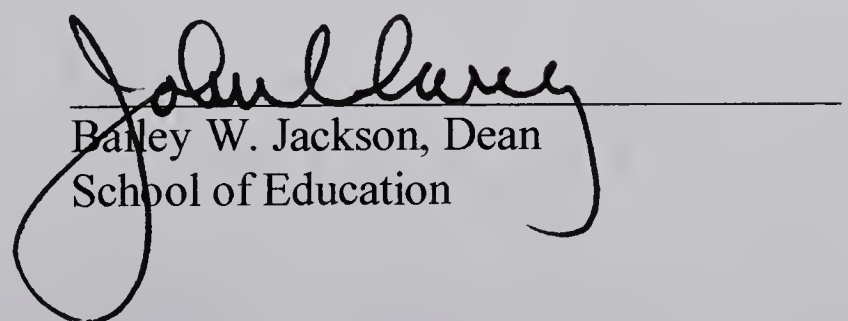
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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Barber  
and the entire Barber family.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Not long ago, I had a dream of completing a dissertation that provided a visual illustration of the social perceptions and experiences of African-American students in a predominantly white college. I shared my dream with Kevin F. Grennan and Gary Malaney. With their encouragement and direction, my dream of using characters from the Afrocentric comic strip College Norms to illustrate students' perceptions and experiences has become a reality. So it is with deep appreciation that I express my gratitude for their assistance in helping me to realize my dreams.

I also wish to acknowledge my sincere appreciation to R. Conley for helping me to understand the true meaning of commitment. You have always expressed confidence in my ability to complete this project and your daily words of wisdom have been a great source of inspiration despite the challenges and adversity that stood before me.

To the many community college students who took part in this research, thank you. Adjusting to a predominantly white college environment can be a difficult experience. Yet through your voice and your stories about campus life African-American students may not longer be invisible to members of the university community.

To J. Maxwell, C. Rousseau, and J. Quinn your artistic abilities are simply fantastic. I have enjoyed working with each of you in the development and presentation of College Norms. More importantly, I sincerely appreciated your friendship.

Finally, I must honestly say that this dissertation would never have been completed without the support, encouragement, and understanding of Sylvia and my children, J. Lynn, B. Edward, and L. Elizabeth. All of you allowed me the space to achieve my dream.

## ABSTRACT

### SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH

FEBRUARY 2002

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Directed by: Professor Kevin F. Grennan

The primary purpose of this study was to explore social perceptions among African-American community college transfer students at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, a predominantly white institution. A secondary purpose was to pictorialize students' social perceptions through a series of storyboards.

The methodology for this study was qualitative, and required in-depth interviewing to explore the social perceptions of participating students. Once the interviewing process was complete, the individual profiles of participating students' were developed and grouped into categories that reveal thematic connections.

Consistent with research on Black students at predominantly White colleges and universities, this study reveals that the extent to which African-American community college transfer students become integrated into the academic and social communities of a campus environment is affected by a number of social adjustment issues. Included among these adjustment issues are conflicts involving: a) racial identity development; b) orientation to the campus environment; c) peer relationships; d) perceptions of racism in the classroom; e) racial stereotyping; f) cultural prejudice; g) self-segregation on campus; h) faculty-student interactions; and i) family encouragement and support.



From the personal narratives of students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the “Main Characters,” pictorials or graphic illustrations of their social perceptions and experiences were developed into storyboards. While the students’ personal narratives allowed them to tell their stories in their own words, the storyboards were the researcher’s attempt to provide a visual interpretation of students’ social perceptions and experiences within the campus environment. Quite often, in a predominantly white college environment, the social perceptions and experiences of African-American students are invisible to those who are responsible for enrollment management or the quality of campus life. Therefore, the fundamental premise behind the development of the storyboards as an illustrative analysis of the research data is that “seeing is believing.”



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the United States, African-Americans have always valued education, viewing it as the key to upward social mobility and economic security (Meier, 1988). However, prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision of 1954, racial quotas, both discriminatory and benign, played a critical role in denying African-Americans access to education at some of the nation's most elite predominantly white colleges and universities (Rothenberg, 1998).

Today, African-Americans students have become one of the largest racial and ethnic minority groups in undergraduate college enrollments, particularly at predominantly white four-year colleges and universities (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). For example, of the nearly 1.5 million African-American students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities in 1995, approximately 852,000 were enrolled at predominantly white four-year colleges and universities (Cross, 1997). According to Cross (1996), “blacks now make up 10.1 percent of all college and university students in the United States, up from 8.8 percent a decade ago” (p. 66).

From an historical perspective, the increased enrollment of African-American students at institutions of higher education represents a significant educational accomplishment. Unfortunately, this accomplishment often creates the illusion that black students have reached parity with white students with respect to access to higher education and persistence to the baccalaureate degree (Alford, 2000). Yet researchers continue to argue that the enrollment of African-American students is disconcerting because of the approximately 621,000 black students who are disproportionately



enrolled at two-year community colleges, and who are least likely to persist to the baccalaureate degree (Cross, 1997).

In 1995, the New England Board of Higher Education reported that African-American students earned only 7.3% of the 1,160,134 bachelor's degrees conferred by institutions of higher education in the United States (Connections, 1998). Additionally, Cross (1998) found that "the annual graduation rate of African-American college students remains about 20% below the rate for white students" (p. 68).

Discrepancies in the graduation rates between African-Americans and whites vary among students and between educational institutions. However, researchers continue to cite the disproportionate enrollment of African-American students at two-year community colleges as an important factor impeding their persistence toward the baccalaureate degree. For example, in their study on the history and development of the American community college, Brint and Karabel (1989) argued that degree persistence among community college students is negatively affected by institutional barriers deeply rooted in the social foundation and function of American higher education. For some researchers, these barriers are evident in a number of institutional policies and procedures, including those that govern the transfer articulation process (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Grubb, 1991).

At most four-year institutions, this process consists of a number of interrelated activities, including orientation (Cook, 1996). Perigo and Upcraft (1989) defined orientation as "any effort to help [students] make the transition from their previous environment to the collegiate environment and enhance their success" (p. 82).

Fox, Zakeley, Morris and Jundt (1993), explored the importance of orientation and its critical role of integrating students into the campus environment. They asserted that

well designed orientation programs are an effective means of aiding students in their initial social and academic integration into an unfamiliar college environment. Moreover, orientation programs coupled with quality academic advising programs, both of which help to integrate students into a new academic and social setting, may exert a positive effect on the retention of students . . . and may also be associated with higher graduation rates. (p. 49)

Laanan (1996) suggest that community college transfers “may not be prepared socially and psychologically for the change in environment from the community college to a four-year college or university” (p. 83). However, Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington (1986) found that “students who initially enrolled in two-year institutions were significantly more likely to obtain or to persist in the pursuit of the baccalaureate degree if they became successfully integrated” (p. 66). Unfortunately, Townsend (1993) contends that four-year colleges and universities are least likely to integrate community college transfers into the academic and social network of peers, faculty, and extracurricular activities.

Among African-American community college students, especially those who transfer to predominantly white colleges and universities, the process of becoming integrated into the four-year college environment is impeded by a number of factors. Some of these factors are determined by institutional characteristics, including location, size, and characteristics of the student body (Watson & Kuh, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Many others, however, are influenced by the personal background

characteristics community college transfer students bring to the college environment (Thompson & Fretz, 1991; Fischer & Shaw, 1999).

Unfortunately, there is little research on the academic and social integration of African-American community college students at predominantly white four-year colleges and universities (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986; Townsend, 1993). Instead, much of the research on African-American students focuses on those who begin their post-secondary education at four-year institutions. While such research has contributed significantly to understanding the experiences of black students within such an environment, we need to have a better understanding of how African-American community college transfer students perceive, give meaning to, and interpret their academic and social integration at predominantly white four-year institutions.

Additionally, we need to listen, with an accepting ear, to how these students describe how selected demographic characteristics influence their involvement in campus social activities and their relations with member of the campus community. With such an understanding, we can best prepare prospective African-American community college transfer students who may be at risk of failing to realize their dreams of persisting to the baccalaureate degree.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of social integration among African-American community college students who transferred to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, a predominantly white institution. The intent was to



determine the relationship between selected demographic characteristics (family social background, race, self-concept, and racial identification) and Tinto's (1975, 1987) theoretical model involving social integration.

The methodology for this study was qualitative and involved a series of in-depth interviews with 16 African-American community college transfer students enrolled in their first year at UMass Dartmouth. The process of listening to these students allowed them to speak for themselves, and to give voice to their own understanding of how they perceived and experienced their social integration at the university. In addition, this process allowed students to share their strategies for coping with difficult social adjustment issues that affected their perceptions of social integration, their involvement in campus social activities, and their interpersonal interactions with member of the campus community.

Since many of the adjustment experiences encountered by participating African-American community college transfer students are not clearly visible to members of the university community, a secondary purpose of this study was to illustrate students' social perceptions through a process known as story boarding. A detailed description of the qualitative research methodology is explained in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

### Limitations of the Study

It was not possible to investigate all of the perceptions influencing the social integration of African-American community college transfer students at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Such perceptions vary among students and can extended well

beyond experiences occurring within the campus environment. Additionally, this was not intended to be a comparative study between students who transferred from a community college and those who begin their post-secondary education at UMass Dartmouth. Nor were the results of this study intended to predict or to control the extent to which all African-American students become integrated into the social communities of the college environment. While readers of this study may be able to relate to the experiences of social integration as reflected in the personal narratives of participating students, the extent to which the participant's perceptions and experiences can be transferred to the reader will depend on the subjectivity of the reader.

By limiting this research to a study of African-American community college transfer students at a predominantly white university, it is not my intent to minimise the important influence of social integration on the collegiate experiences and degree persistence of other students of color. It is also not my intent to suggest that African-Americans students are more worthy of study. The importance of social integration to the degree persistence of college students is a national concern and should require the attention of all those who are directly or indirectly affected by this experience. I, therefore, encourage the development of research that seeks to bring about substantial improvements in the social life of a campus environment so that all students, including those from diverse racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, can have a better chance at realizing their dream of persisting to the baccalaureate degree.

In his research, Harbin (1994) suggested that "the best source of advice for future transfer students are students who have already been through the transfer process and have experienced its transitional effects" (p. 37). Thus, it is my hope that the



perceptions shared by students in this study will be used at both two-year and four-year institutions in helping community college transfers to better understand the experience of social integration in a predominantly white college environment. It is also my hope that this study will contribute to the existing but limited body of qualitative research that explores the experiences of African-American community college transfer students at four-year colleges and universities.

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the problem, the purpose of the study, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the stated problem. Chapter 3 identifies the research methodology, including research design and setting, the student population under study, the data collection procedures, and the process of illustrating students' social perceptions. Chapter 4 includes the presentation and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 provides an illustrative analysis of students' social perceptions and experiences. Finally, Chapter 6 presents conclusions drawn from the findings, the implications of this research, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The literature identifies a number of factors that significantly influences the social integration and baccalaureate persistence of African-American at predominantly white colleges and universities. Unfortunately, much of this research focuses on the social experiences of black students who begin their post-secondary education at such institutions. According to Townsend (1993), less frequently is attention directed toward understanding the experiences of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions where they are least likely to become integrated into the academic and social systems of the campus environment.

#### Section I: Theoretical Framework

The theory of academic and social integration has proven to be critical in understanding the experiences of most college students. In fact, Tinto's (1975, 1987) theory of academic and social integration has served as the conceptual framework for numerous research studies (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992). Its influence on college persistence is not only well documented, but has generated a vast amount of research on the experiences of students from diverse racial, cultural, and educational backgrounds (Eimers & Pike, 1997). However, as a theoretical perspective, this model is simply "a variation on the theme of person-environment fit" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 411).

Within this theoretical framework, Tinto (1975, 1987) posited that colleges and universities are educational environments consisting of academic and social communities. Persistence within such an environment involves a longitudinal process of interactions between students and members of the campus community, including peers, faculty, administrators. During the process of interaction, students' experiences "lead to varying levels of normative and structural integration and the...commitment to the goal of college completion and to the institution " (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 103). In their research, Christie and Dinham (1991) note that integration into the academic and social communities of a college environment also involves the needs for students to separate from past communities, to make a complete and successful transition into their new environment, and to and adopt the norms and patterns of behavior shared by the dominant population.

Although Tinto (1975) distinguishes between formal and informal social integration, researchers have used various definitions in the employment of these constructs. For example, Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla (1995) defined formal social integration as "contact with formal representatives and organizations of the university, specifically, contact with faculty and staff members in officially recognized student organizations " (p. 543). They define informal social integration as "participation in the social life of the campus and the development of social relationships with fellow students within the residences halls, classrooms and other campus social activities (Mayo, et al., 1995).

According to Tinto (1975), students who fail to make a successful transition or experience "even minimal levels of academic or social integration, and minimal



institutional commitment,” are likely to suffer from alienation or what is referred to as malintegration (p. 59). He defines malintegration as “the outcome of one’s holding values highly divergent from those of the social collectivity, and . . . insufficient personal interactions with other members of the collectivity” (p. 59).

Researchers studying the enrollment behavior of community college students have also employed various aspects of Tinto’s theoretical perspective in an effort to understand students’ experience of academic and social integration. They have investigated predictors of academic and social integration, patterns of academic and social integration, and students’ perceptions about the experience of academic and social integration among community college students (Bers & Smith, 1991; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983).

In their research, Pascarella and Chapman (1983) found that “the predominant pattern of social and academic integration that characterizes a community college is significantly different from the patterns of participation that describe integration in a liberal arts college or university” (p. 317). They also found that at two-year institutions, students had more informal social contact with faculty than did students at four-year institutions. However, in comparing students across institutional types, community college students are least socially integrated within the college environment, leaving researchers to believe that the variables of academic and social integration may have a limited effect on their persistence (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Yet Tinto (1975) asserts that “the absence of integrative interactions is likely to lead many community college students to disassociate themselves from [the academic and social] communities and eventually withdraw” (p. 35).

Nora, Attinnsi, and Matonak (1989) studied the relationship between academic and social integration and persistence among community college students. They found that while academic integration has a somewhat positive influence on persistence among two-year college students, social integration does not influence persistence either positively or negatively.

Nora (1993) investigated the experience of social integration among students of color at two-year community colleges. She found that most community college students perceived social integration as “the development of a strong affiliation with the college social environment both in the classroom and outside of class, and included interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers of a social nature” (p. 237).

Fox (1986) discovered that quite often non-traditional community college students fail to get involved in campus life not because they lack commitment to the institution or to the goal of completing the degree. Instead, the vast majority of these students are commuters, and often not involved in campus activities because of more pressing external obligations or family commitments that limit their ability to become academically and socially integrated within the college environment.

### Criticism of Academic and Social Integration

A number of researchers have employed aspects of Tinto’s model in examining the participation of African-American students in mainstream campus-wide activities at both two-year and four-year institutions (Hurtaso, 1992). In fact, Loo and Rolison (1986) assert that the theory of academic and social integration can be used to understand and explain the entire collegiate experience of African-American students at



predominantly white institutions. Within such an environment, black students are at a higher risk of malintegration because of various personal, social, and academic adjustment issues (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

In their research, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found that “academic integration, particularly as it pertains to meeting the formal demands of the academic system, may be a more important influence on persistence for black students than is social integration” (p. 412). They also found “evidence [which] suggest that social integration and social support may be as important to the persistence and educational attainment of black students in general as is academic integration” (p. 413).

However, despite the popularity of Tinto’s theoretical perspective, this model has not escaped criticism. For example, Christie and Dinham (1991) suggest that Tinto’s model on social integration does not accurately reflect the experiences of African-American students in predominantly white institutions because it fails to give equal consideration to the influence of the external social environment on persistence.

Although Tinto does not deny the impact of external factors on student persistence, he does place such “influences outside the realm of social integration” (Christie & Dinham, 1991, p. 433). Yet Christie and Dinham (1991) “demonstrate the salience of external forces in students’ daily lives, suggesting that external experiences must be placed alongside institutional experiences...in attempts to explain persistence” (p. 433).

Tinto’s theoretical perspective has also been criticized by Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997). They suggested that the theory of academic and social integration may need reformation because it does not adequately address the difficult transitional adjustments and social experiences often encountered by black students at predominantly

white institutions. Unfortunately, researchers exploring the experiences of African-American at such institutions continue to “use constructs [of Tinto’s model] that reflect participation in mainstream activities in college without considering whether the social distance between racial and ethnic groups may inhibit participation in these activities” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 327).

Another criticism of Tinto’s theoretical perspective comes from Hurtado and Carter (1997). They argued that the theory of academic and social integration is

weakened by criticism and empirical tests that have showed that . . . this model is problematic [because it] does not acknowledge that integration is complicated by racially tense environments for diverse groups of students whose responses to adversity are complex. (p. 340)

According to Nottingham, Rosen, and Parks (1992), within a predominantly white college environment, African-American students are often challenged by a number of difficult social and psychological adjustment issues that make integration into the campus environment a very difficult experience. Additionally, they suggest that the academic persistence and well-being of African-American students are negatively affected by the high-pressure and often non-supportive environment that characterizes most predominantly white institutions

Hurtado and Carter (1997) believe that Tinto’s theoretical model involving social integration is neither clear nor cohesive among African-American students at predominantly white colleges and universities. Since the vast majority of black students have not experienced the level of racial discrimination and prejudice visible during the 1960s, Hurtado and Carter argue that they students have a misunderstanding about what social integration within such an environment really means.



Wicker (1996) asserts that despite the success of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, African-Americans continue to be marginalized, discriminated against, and denied the privilege of becoming fully integrated into all aspects of American life. Thus, at many predominantly white institutions, the promise of becoming integrated into the academic and social communities of the college environment often remains unfulfilled for African-American students because of various social impediments found within the campus environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Included among these impediments are issues involving race relations, incidents of racial prejudice, and perceptions of racial discrimination, all of which have a negative influence on the personal development and social integration of students of diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1987).

In their study, Moss and Young (1995) contended that “the diversity that exists in the urban community college is not addressed in a meaningful way in Tinto’s model of departure” because it expects all individuals, regardless of their racial, cultural, or ethnic background, to affiliate with the dominant culture. Moss and Young (1995), therefore, conclude that expectations surrounding Tinto’s model may be a barrier to African-American students’ success because of divergent cultural variables that influence the way these students perceive and experience the college environment.

Researchers argue that African-American students who begin their post-secondary education at a two-year community college are different from African-American students who initially enter four-year institutions with respect to such characteristics as self-perception, academic ability and preparation, age, and educational aspirations (Grubb, 1991). Additionally, in their research on the relationship between institutional

characteristics and the characteristics of individual students, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (1996) found that “students attending 4-year undergraduate institutions differ from students attending a 2-year institution regarding educational aspirations” and the experience of alienation (p. 60).

### Demographic Factors Influencing Social Integration

Since the theoretical framework for this study is Tinto’s (1975, 1987) perspective on social integration, this literature review is organized around certain demographic variables and the independent variables of this theory and this study. They are family social background, self-concept, race, and racial identity development; Tinto’s variables of social integration and perceptions of social interactions via peer group associations, faculty relationships, and involvement in co-curricular activities. Together, these variables influence not only how well African-American students will perform academically, but also how they will interact with and eventually become integrated into the social communities of the college environment.

### Family Social Background as a Factor

Previous studies have shown that academic and social integration is influenced by a number of demographic factors, including those associated with family background characteristics (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, in this study of the social integration of African-American community college students at a predominantly white university, attention is directed toward family background characteristics that describe the social and cultural environment from which students



matriculate. Of particular concern are background characteristics that describe the quality of relationships within the family, the social expectations parents have for their students, and the encouragement and support students receive from parents or significant others to complete their education.

Researchers have determined that among African-American students, the social background characteristics of the family have an important influence on students' persistence toward degree completion, particularly at a predominantly white institution. For example, in their examination of social and psychological factors affecting the retention of students of color, Armstrong-West and de la Teja (1987) assert that while "family support is a significant factor for all students, it is of special significance to minorities" at predominantly white colleges (p. 34).

In their research on family attachment and the psychological of well-being of racially and ethnically diverse first-year students, Kenny and Perez (1996) found that among African-American, Latino, and Asian American students, positive family attachment and support had a direct influence on students at a predominantly white college. They conclude that "as students leave home for college, the perceptions that they share a positive affective relationship with an important family member and are supported in their independent strivings appear more important to psychological well-being" (p. 532).

Eimers and Pike (1997) investigated "factors perceived to be sensitive to the college adjustment process experienced by minority and non-minority students" at a Midwestern university (p. 81). One of the findings from their study suggests that

“encouragement from family and friends had an important influence on minority and non-minority students’ intentions to persist in college” (p. 93).

Unfortunately, while family support and encouragement is greatest among African-American students, Armstrong-West and de la Teja, (1987) argued that the parents of many African-American students are less able to provide it. Armstrong-West and de la Teja also assert that because the parents of minority students “lack collegiate experience and familiarity with predominantly white higher education institutions,” minority students are often deprived of the necessary psychological support and encouragement to persist toward degree completion (p. 35).

Additionally, Coad (1996) notes that for many inner-city African-American students, persistence to graduation is complicated by the fact that many of them “drive to campus, attend classes, and then leave campus quickly for work or family responsibilities” (p. 6). Within the various communities from which they matriculate, Wilson (1996) argue that African-Americans often reside in neighborhoods where the culture and “social interactions among neighbors tend to be confined to those whose skills, styles, orientations, and habits are not as conducive to promoting positive social outcomes (academic success, pro-social behaviors, etc.) as are those in more stable neighborhoods” (p. 63). Because of the characteristics of their home communities, Wilson also contends that many African-American students may not receive the kind of psychological, environmental, or even family support necessary to ensure their educational success at the collegiate level. He, therefore, concludes that for urban African-American students, degree persistence is often impeded by low self-concept,

hopeless motivational patterns, and negative perceptions about themselves and the environment in which they live.

Alford (1998) also explored the social experiences of African-American students from urban communities. She contends that “the neighborhoods and familial environments [from which they matriculate] may work against their ability to become thoroughly integrated into the college environment” (p. 226). She further argues that within the inner-city neighborhoods and familial environments, students often acquire social values and/or associate with community groups that do “not support academic pursuits, severely reducing the likelihood [that they] will remain in college” (p. 229).

Finally, in their research on mental health and perceptions of racism, Fischer and Shaw (1999) stress the importance of parents in developing a family social structure that encourages racial socialization. They define racial socialization as “the process of communicating behaviors and messages to children for the purpose of enhancing their sense of racial/ethnic identity, partially in preparation for racially hostile encounters” (p. 396). From their research, Fischer and Shaw have determined that for many African-American students, especially those at predominantly white institutions, self-esteem and racial socialization beliefs “may serve a healthy, protective function in the face of perceived racist discrimination” (p. 397).

### Self-Concept as a Factor

Another demographic factor contributing to the degree completion and the integration of African-American students into the academic and social communities of a predominantly white college environment, involves the development of a positive self



concept (Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1987). They also suggest that “the extent to which a person’s self-concept is confirmed or rejected by others is crucial to the person’s development and to social and academic integration” (p. 36).

Gordon (1995) defines “self- concept as a multifaceted phenomenon consisting of beliefs about one’s own abilities, beliefs about environmental supportiveness, and emphasis placed on certain goals important to one’s self-concept” (p. 243).

Additionally, Wood (1991) notes that “issues of self-concept and self-esteem [often] arise when people find themselves living in a cross-cultural environment” (p. 21).

Finally, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) suggest that “perceptions of self and beliefs about others’ perceptions of oneself shape not only individuals’ internal, psychological structures but also their response to and interactions with the social” environment in which they live (p. 223).

Despite the importance of self-concept, Mayo and Christenfeld (1999) suggest that many African-American students often enter predominantly white colleges enter such institutions with low self-esteem and a negative self-perception, believing instead that they are not good enough to compete with other students within the collegiate environment. Additionally, Steele (1996) suggest that African-American students enter predominantly white institutions only to be confronted by such unendurable feelings, as “diminishment, accountability to the preconceptions of whites, a powerlessness to change those preconceptions, and shame” (p. 135). According to Steele, these feelings adversely affect their social and psychological development as well as their ability to successfully adjust to the college environment.



In her study, Hughes (1987) notes that predominantly white colleges are least likely to provide a positive experience for African-American students because they impede students' confidence and identity development. She suggest that an important issue contributing to this phenomenon is the fact that "predominantly white institutions are often perceived by black students as environments that are intellectually orientated, independence oriented, and competition orienated" (p. 535).

Tracey and Sedlacek (1987) studied the importance of several non-cognitive variables on the academic success of 208 African-American and 1,475 white students at a predominantly white university. Using the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), they sought to assess such factors as: the importance of having a positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, understanding and dealing with racism, long and short-term goal commitment, support systems, leadership experience, community service, educational aspirations, and academic familiarity" on students' academic success. The results of their study indicated "that different processes are involved in academic success for white and black students" (p. 344). Specifically, the non-cognitive dimensions that had a positive affect on the academic success of African-American students "were having a positive self-concept, a realistic self-appraisal, preferring long-range goals to more short-term needs, and having some leadership experience" (p. 345).

Chang (1999) studied the perceptions of 11,680 students attending over 370 racially diverse four-year colleges and universities in an attempt to answer the question "Does racial diversity matter?" (p. 377). The results of his study found that "a racially heterogeneous student population has a direct positive impact on students' likelihood of both socializing with someone of a different racial group and discussing racial issues"

(p. 391). Chang, therefore, suggest that socializing with someone of another racial group and discussing racial or ethnic issues...positively affects [students] retention, overall college satisfaction, intellectual self-concept, and social self-concept” (p. 391).

### Racial Identity Development as a Factor

In their research on the perceptions, interactions, and relationships of African-American students in a traditional college environment, Armstrong-West and de al Teja (1987) note that “racial identity is one component of the self-concept, and that the value and importance individuals place on [their] racial identity contributes to [their] self-worth” (p. 35). Equally important is the fact that racial identity development is recognized as one of the demographic factors influencing the adjustment, achievement, and social integration of African-American college students in a predominantly white college environment (Neville, Heppner, & Wang, 1997). Unfortunately, within such an environment, African-American students are often faced with general and culture-specific stressors that pressure them to give “up their identities and to adapt to the surrounding white culture, with its distinctive white middle-class ways of talking, dressing, and acting” (Feagin & Sikes, 1994, p. 93).

In their research on the sociocultural alienation of black students at a small public predominantly white university within the California system of higher education, Loo and Rolison (1986) conducted face-to-face interviews with 163 undergraduate students. The results of their study indicate that minority students were perceived to face greater sociocultural difficulties, and that the “cultural dominance of white,



middle-class values on campus, [often pressure them] to acquire white, middle-class values and to reject their own” (p. 64).

Taylor (1986) suggests that at many predominantly white institutions African-American students “do not have a clear understanding or an acceptance of themselves” because of various social issues that have had a negative affect on their racial identity development. Often seen as “a continuous process of interactions between individuals and the sociocultural environment they encounter, racial identity development is partly the conscious, largely unconscious sense of who one is, both as a person and as a contributor to society” (p. 46).

McCowan and Alston (1998) suggest that a potential indicator of positive self-perception among African-American students is a strong racial identity. Helms (1990) defines racial identity as ethnocentrism or the beliefs and attitudes one holds about race and membership in one’s own racial group. Helms’ theoretical model on “racial identity development involves a dynamic maturation process in which individuals move from internalization of negative racial messages to adoption of a positive racial group orientation” (Neville, Heppner & Wang, 1997, p. 303). According to Helms, there is a strong relationship between racial identity development and the culture-specific modes of adaptation employed by African-American students in their attempt to successfully adjust to and become integrated within what may appear to be a racially oppressive environment (Neville, Heppner & Wang, 1997).

Although Helms (1990, 1995) has written extensively on the relationship between racial identity development and the psychological well-being of African-American students, many researchers continue to examined the social adjustment and

experiences of black students at predominantly white institutions using Cross' (1971) nigrescence model on black racial identity (Coakley, 1999). This model consist of five stages: the Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, Internalization-Commitment (Cross, 1971).

In the “Pre-encounter” or “discovery stage,” individuals perceive the world from a Eurocentric frame of reference, while devaluing or denying their own blackness and hoping to becoming assimilated or integrated into the dominated white cultural environment. During the Encounter stage, the individual is confronted with a startling experience, which forces him or her to question his/her identity and to reinterpret his/her initial views and beliefs about the black experience. In the Immersion-Emersion stage, the individual seeks to better understand his or her Blackness, while becoming increasingly aware of black pride, and attempting to idealize everything that is black. The Internalization stage provides the individual with a sense of inner security and satisfaction with his or her racial/ethnic identity. The final stage, Internalization-Commitment involves a commitment on the part of the individual to work towards the reformation and advancement of the black community.

A number of researchers have explored the social perceptions and adjustment experiences of African-American students at predominantly white colleges from the theoretical perspective of racial identity development (Allen, 1992). For example, Taub and McEwen (1992) investigated the racial identity attitudes of 320 African-American and white women at a predominantly white residential university. Using the Black Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS-B), the findings of their study “suggest that there are two separate and very different developmental processes for black college women – racial



identity development and psychosocial development” (p. 444). They conclude that these developmental processes occur in opposition to one another, and “reflect the duality of black women’s experience as minorities in white society” (p. 444).

Mitchell and Dell (1992) used a personal data questionnaire to examine the relationship between racial identity attitude and the involvement of African-American students in cultural or non-cultural organizations at a predominantly white university. They defined non-cultural organizations as “those groups for which the primary focus is on the needs and interest of blacks or the membership consists primarily of blacks; those groups that did not have such a focus were called non-cultural” (p. 40). Findings from their study “suggest that as people become more comfortable with their racial identity, they are more likely to display interest and openness in both cultural and cultural activities” (p. 42).

McCowan and Alston (1998) investigated the “relationship between racial identity, African self-consciousness, and career decision making among African-American women at an historically black university and a predominantly white university” (p. 28). The findings of their study suggest that during college, “students undergo a maturation process that enables them not only to immerse themselves in African-American culture, but also to move beyond this point and subsequently develop an appreciation for other cultures” (p. 34). They also found that, in terms of racial identity, black women [in their senior year of college] possess stronger internalization attitudes than first-year students. However, there was not a significant difference between these groups on African self-consciousness” (p. 34). On the other hand, “there

was not a significant difference in internalization attitudes of racial identity between senior and first-year women at predominantly white institutions” (p. 35).

Coakley (1998) investigated the extent to which the racial composition of a campus environment facilitates the development of certain racial ideologies among African-American students attending historically black colleges and African-American students at predominantly white colleges. The findings of their study suggest that, unlike African-American students at historically black colleges, African-American students at predominantly white institutions often “adopt assimilationist views and practices,” “develop a more humanist ideology,” and display a lower “consciousness of their cultural heritage” (p. 243). These strategies are critical in helping African-American students to survive and thrive within such an environment.

### Race as a Factor

Loo and Rolison (1986) believe that the theory of academic and social integration can be used to understand and explain the entire collegiate experience of African-American students who attend predominantly white four-year colleges. Within such institutions, African-American students are at a higher risk of malintegration because they are more likely to experience sociocultural alienation and an environment that does not reflect their values (Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Yet, according to Deit (1992), most students enter college with the understanding that cultural diversity should be one of the more positive experiences of higher education. This is particularly true at predominantly white institutions where both black and white students often believe that “increased opportunities for positive interracial interactions



and multicultural learning are the first steps toward resolving racial tensions on campus” (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995, p. 131).

In a study of 25,000 students at 217 four-year colleges and universities, Astin (1993) found that “the more students discuss racial and ethnic issues during their undergraduate years or socialize with people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, the greater their desire to encourage cultural awareness” (p. D1). Additional research by Chang (1999) found that a racially diverse college environment has a positive effect on the educational experience of all students, and that such environments increase the possibility that students will experience “overall college satisfaction, intellectual self-confidence, and social self-confidence” (p. 391).

In college recruitment and marketing publications, most colleges and universities, but especially predominantly white institutions, often project an atmosphere that fosters diversity, civility, and integration in all aspects of campus life. Thus, African-American students who enter predominantly white colleges do so believing that they will experience “less racial prejudice and more social integration” (Fleming, 1984, p. 18). Unfortunately, such is not always the case. At many predominantly white colleges, African-American students encounter environments that “tend to reduce integration, to distance them from the academic and social communities of the institution, promoting [instead] the individual’s marginality and ultimately withdrawal” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 53).

In their research on the impact of race on the social experience of African-American students at predominantly white institutions, Fisher and Hartmann (1995) found that “race is a far more salient issue for black students than it is for white students”



(p. 130). They also found that, at predominantly white colleges, racism contributes significantly to the hostility and prejudice experienced by black students within such an environment.

In his investigation of racial attitudes among first-year students at a predominantly white university, Saddlemire (1996) found that race was an important factor influencing peer relationships between African-American students and white students. He also found that the majority of the white students interviewed had little or no interactions with African-Americans prior to college enrollment. Thus, their interactions and relationships with African-American students were often based on various myths, misinformation, and the limited frame of reference. Unfortunately, this type of behavior only heightens racial tension and created more of a social distance between the two groups. This tension often allows white students to “fade back into the comfort of a peer culture almost identical to the one they left in their high school and hometown” (p. 690). On the other hand, African-American students were “forced to either assimilate into the [white] culture or develop strategies to cope with a collegiate environment they perceived as unsupportive and often hostile” (p. 690).

Bohr, Pascarella, Nora, and Terenzini (1995) explored the academic experiences of African-American students at 5 two-year and 18 four-year historically black and predominantly white institutions of higher education. The findings from their study suggest that unlike predominantly white colleges, historically black colleges are much more effective at providing African-American students with a “supportive social-psychological environment that enhances persistence and degree completion while

maintaining an academic climate that is at least equivalent in intellectual rigor and impact” (p. 83).

Flowers and Pascarella (1999) used an eight-item Likert-type scale to explore the impact of the college racial composition on the growth in African-American students’ value and openness to racial and cultural diversity at 18 four-year institutions. The major findings of this study suggest that: a) the racial composition of the institution had a significant influence on the sensitivity and openness of African-American students to diversity; b) peer group association, particularly among individuals who participated in intercollegiate athletics, had a significant influence on students’ openness to diversity; and c) the growth in openness to diversity varied for students with different pre-college characteristics and experiences within the college environment.

Bryson (1998) attempted to assess individual and group attitudes toward African-American men using variables taken from the Attitudes Toward the Disabled Person Scale (ATDS). The results of his study revealed that “despite the progress that has been made in race relations, race remains a factor in black and white interactions, particularly those that involve black men” (p. 292). Bryson further suggests that “besides the problems created by institutional overt discrimination, black men frequently encounter negative stereotyping [which suggests that they are] socially constricted, insecure in their male identity, and lacking in positive self-concept” (p. 283).

In Tinto’s (1975) theoretical perspective, “it is individual perceptions of social and academic integration that are most directly associated with persistence” (p. 109). However, for African-American students, the extent to which African-American students become integrated into the academic and social communities of a predominantly white



institution is also influenced by their perceptions of a racist and non-supportive college environment (Gloria, Robinson-Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999).

In a study of the experiences of black students, Pounds (1987) noted that in “their transition from the previous social environment to the unknown and often intimidating” predominantly white college environment, African-American students often encounter a number of social perceptions that make integration and persistence extremely difficult (p. 278). More importantly, “framed within a climate of racial discrimination” or racial hostility, perceptions of the campus environment can make it even more difficult for African-American students to experience academic and social integration (Pounds, 1987, p. 30).

Nottingham, Rosen and Parks (1992) determined that African-American students who have negative perceptions of a predominantly white college environment often feel socially isolated, are personally dissatisfied with their college experience, and encounter difficulties in becoming integrated into both the academic and social life of the college. Additionally, Nora and Cabrea (1996) studied the influence of perceptions of prejudice on experiences of black students at a predominantly white commuter university. Results of their study suggest that “minority students were more likely to perceive a discriminatory campus climate, sensed more prejudice on the part of faculty and staff, and were more prone to report negative in-class experiences than white students” (p. 130). However, students’ perceptions of prejudice did not have an adverse affect on persistence or academic achievement. Instead, encouragement and support from parents and positive interactions with faculty had more of a positive affect on students’ academic achievement (Nora & Cabrea, 1996).



Eimers and Pike (1997) surveyed students at a predominantly white residential university in the Midwest using a “comprehensive model of student persistence that intentionally included factors that were perceived to be sensitive to the college adjustment process experienced by minority students” (p. 81). Their study found that for minority students, perceptions of racial discrimination within the college environment had an adverse affect on their academic integration and achievement.

Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis, and Thomas (1999) conducted a qualitative study investigating the social experiences of 126 first-year African-American students in a peer mentoring program at a predominantly white university. Participants in this study reported that they “had a difficult time either adjusting to the campus racial/cultural climate generally or with specific cross-cultural social relationships” (p. 190). Participating students also indicated that they “felt underrepresented, isolated, and alienated; experienced situations, statements, or actions perceived as racist; and were ambivalent when initiating contact with faculty, believing that being African-American might negatively affect their relationship with faculty” (p. 190).

Cross (1998/1999) published the result of a study on the state of race relations at predominantly white institutions of higher education conducted by Howard Greene. According to this report “Greene surveyed more than 4,000 undergraduate students at 17 prestigious private colleges and universities and 3 state universities” (p. 42). About one third of the African-American students who responded to the survey conducted by Greene confirmed that they had been indirectly affected by racism. In his study, Greene defined “racism as knowing of a racial incident that affected a close friend or roommate” (p. 42).

Finally, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998) investigated the psychological dimension of campus racial climate. They suggest that an “individuals’ views of group relations, institutional responses to diversity, perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict, and attitudes towards those from other racial/ethnic backgrounds than one’s own” are critical factors that determine future interactions and outcomes within such an environment (p. 289).

### Peer Group Associations

According to Tinto (1975, 1987), social integration is most appropriate at four-year residential colleges. Within such an environment, social integration, particularly as it relates to involvement in campus social activities, “comes as a natural response to living in the residence halls [where] friendships usually develop among those who share similar interests such as courses in which they are enrolled and particular types of social activities” (Alford, 1998, p. 225). Within a residential college environment, peer relationships can also easily develop “among students with fundamental racial, ethnic, or other differences [who] share certain unique experiences of campus life” (Alford, 1998, p. 225).

According to Saddlemire (1996), “building and maintaining healthy peer relationships” and “having a supportive peer culture” are both critically important for African-American students at predominantly white institutions (p. 684). In their research on the educational gains of black students and white students at a predominantly white college environment, Mackay and Kuh (1994) found that “peer interaction is a key factor



in student learning and personal development for both Caucasian and African-American students” (p. 221).

Unfortunately, within such an environment, African-Americans and other students of diverse backgrounds often remain strangers separated by racial differences (Chang, 1999). Beckham (1988) asserts that in predominantly white institutions, African-American students are “strangers in a strange land” (p. 75).

According to Barnes-McConnell (1995), the gap in relations between black and white students continues to widen because of perceptions of racial discrimination and the increasing number of hate crimes often directed toward black students. Consequently, the perception of prejudice has become one campus reality that has had a negative impact on the enrollment and persistence of African-American students, particularly at predominantly white institutions where rates of attrition are disproportionately higher for African-American students (Allen, 1992).

Since its inception, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education has published a record of incidents of racial hostility directed against black students at predominantly white colleges and universities throughout the United States (Cross, 1996). However, for those of us who have studied the enrollment of black students in American higher education, these reports come as no surprise. After all, racial discrimination and incidents of blatant racial hostility directed against black students have a long and outstanding history in American higher education, especially at some of the nation’s most elite, predominantly white institutions of higher education (Synnott, 1988).

Writing in Black Issues in Higher Education, Phillips (1993) stated that “behind the stately facades of ivy-covered walls with neatly manicured lawns, a simple truth is



revealed in high relief – racism, classism and sexism prevail” (p. 19). Her sentiments have been expressed by hundreds of black students across the country, many of whom “complain of isolation, a curriculum that cries out for diversity and of having to battle racism along with a demanding academic schedule” (Phillips, 1993, p. 19). For example, in a narrative detailing her experiences as a black student in a predominantly white college environment, Millner (1998) stated

I came here with the knowledge that things would be different, that my identity and consciousness as a black person would be radically altered ...I experienced a lot of isolation on campus before I went home for Christmas. It was frustrating, but I didn't think much of it. It wasn't until I returned after the holidays that I realized how damaging this isolation was. (p. 120)

In his research, Dougherty (1992) found that African-American students who transfer from predominantly black community colleges may have a difficult time adjusting to a senior college environment especially if such an environment has a small minority population or is “suffering from the spasms of racial tension that have shaken such well known institutions as the University of Massachusetts [Amherst] and the University of Michigan” (p. 201). His findings are supported by other researchers, including Fleming (1984), whose earlier research found that “the stress of racial tension and inadequate social lives borne by black students at white schools generates feelings of alienation, psychological withdrawal,” and a dysfunctional academic and intellectual career (p. 3).

According to some researchers, many of the racial incidents occurring at predominantly white colleges and universities are encouraged by institutional structures and systems that help create the perception, and in some cases, the reality that African-American students are not welcomed (Lee & Frank, 1990). This is particularly true at

colleges and universities where institutional structures and systems lend themselves to creating and sustaining a campus environment where racial stereotypes often challenge African-Americans with acts of discrimination, and even racial hostility (Barnes-McConnell, 1995). Unfortunately, “the cognitive stereotypes of modern racism, which include myths about black inferiority and incompetence,” are often downplayed or ignored by college administrators (Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990).

According to Steele (1990), the consequences of negative stereotyping, which is endorsed by the legacy of white campus racism, continue to have devastating affects on the self-perception, self-identity, and self-esteem of African-American students who matriculate at predominantly white institutions. Under the weight of racial stereotyping and white campus racism, African-American students often doubt themselves and their ability to adjust to the social and psychological demands of the college environment.

Steele (1990) asserts that the

ever-vigilant anti-self will grab this racial doubt and mix it into the pool of personal doubt, so that when a black student walks into an integrated situation [such as] a largely white college campus [environment] he will be vulnerable to the entire realm of his self-doubt before a single word is spoken. (p. 44)

Even in its simplest form, white racism often leaves African-American students vulnerable to stereotypes that make them feel invisible, marginalized, and even alienated from the larger campus community (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Additionally, these feelings, and the various experiences associated with them, have led some researchers to believe that the racist campus environment of predominantly white institutions is a contributing factor influencing the persistence of African-American students (Steele,



1990). On most predominantly white college campuses, rates of attrition among African-American students continue to be consistently higher than rates of attrition among white students (Steele, 1990).

West (1993) asserted that race continues to matter in all aspects of American life.

However, according to Steele (1996),

race is especially evident in higher education where African-American students are often judged not by the content of their character, but by stereotypes that characterize their intellectual ability, their educational aspirations, and even their academic motivation. Unfortunately, being judged by a stereotype - or inadvertently fulfilling it - can cause an anxiety so disruptive that it impairs intellectual performance (p. F5).

Steele further argued that the obstacles caused by racial stereotypes, and other related social or cultural constraints, help to explain the troubling statistics on the scarcity of blacks in predominantly white institutions of higher education. Steele, therefore, encouraged institutions of higher education to find better ways to understand the social and environmental conditions that often leave African-American students vulnerable to stereotypes that impede their enrollment behavior, their academic performance, and their persistence toward degree completion.

In another study, Bonner (1997) explored the “emotional and psychological difficulties black males encounter in responding to destructive elements inherent in predominantly white institution” (p. 406). Despite these difficulties, few African-American males seek the services of the college’s counseling center to assist them in developing strategies to survive in such an environment. According to Hughes (1987), “both black men and black women are aware that most predominantly white universities are not necessarily healthy environments for their development. Nurturance, confidence building, and positive identity formation are stifled on these campuses” (p. 543). Thus,



African-American students who matriculate at predominantly white institutions must be “self-starters who are fully independent persons with strong defence to combat stereotypes, fears, alienation, and loneliness” (p. 543).

It should be noted, however, that the negative perceptions and stereotypes that impede the social integration of African-American males are simply a reflection of their social experiences within the larger society. In his article on the “Black Male: America’s Most Feared,” Monroe (1995) wrote “black men face a wall of stereotypes, suspicion and apathy that blocks successful participation in the American dream” (p. 20). For some of them the dream of enrolling at the college of choice, being fully integrated into the campus environment, and persisting to the baccalaureate degree are also impeded.

### Student-Faculty Relations

Another factor influencing the degree persistence of African-American students is academic integration, particularly is the nature of their relationship with their faculty within the campus environment. In their research, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) provided evidence which suggest that the faculty’s commitment to ensuring “academic integration, particularly as it pertains to meeting the formal demands of the academic system, may be a more important influence on persistence for black students than is social integration” (p. 412).

Although the preference for advising styles may differ among various racial groups, researchers have “concluded that most students, including African-Americans, prefer developmental advising in both two-year and four-year institutions” (Herndon, Kaiser, Creamer, 1996, p. 638). The nature of the developmental advising process

emphasizes communication and shared responsibility between students and faculty members who are concerned, caring, and sincerely interested in helping students make educational and career decisions. Yet, while developmental advising is most effective at meeting the educational and developmental needs of students (Herndon, Kaiser, Creamer, 1996), at many four-year colleges the faculty academic advising system is not as effective as it might be at meeting the needs and expectations of African-American students (Crockett, 1985).

In their research, Feagin, Vera, Imani (1996) found that at predominantly white institutions, African-American students are unable to establish the kind of relationship with a faculty advisor that will enable them to become integrated into the academic and social systems of the college environment. Unfortunately, at predominantly white institutions, African-American students often perceive the faculty academic advising system as being hostile, insensitive, or involving subtle discriminatory treatments which can have a devastating effect on their academic success.

Additionally, Calathes (1991) suggests that at predominantly white institutions the faculty academic advising system often involves a system of conflicting institutional values, autonomy and independence versus support and dependency. It also involves various attitudes among the faculty which often fail to enhance self-esteem, self-perception, and even a sense of identity development of African-American students. Equally important, however, is the fact the faculty advising system also fails to provide African-American students with the necessary encouragement to persist towards the baccalaureate degree (Calathes, 1991).

According to Feagin et al.(1996) “the fact that the established advising system often fails to work for black students is not just a matter of some advisors’ stereotyping or insensitivity. It is often a matter of inadequate experience on the part of white academic advisors or of the inadequate training provided for white advisors at many mainly white universities” (p. 121).

Armstrong-West and de la Teja (1987) studied the social and psychological experiences of African American students at predominantly white colleges. In their research, they noted that many faculty members continue to perceive black students as individuals who “do not measure up intellectually [ and are] enrolled only because of a special admissions programs that lowers admissions requirements for minorities,” and “are not expected to excel” (p. 30).

If faculty advisors are unable to enhance the integration of African-American students into the campus environment community, many of these students will continue to have a difficult time adjusting to the academic and psychosocial demands of college life (Pounds, 1990). Others, however, may move towards attrition, unable to resolve conflicts which can impede their intellectual growth and psycho-social development in a predominately white college environment (Fleming, 1984).

### Involvement in Co-curricular Activities

In Tinto’s (1975) theoretical perspective, “social integration [can] also occur through semi-formal extracurricular activities” (p. 107). Yet, for many African-American students at predominantly white colleges and universities, such is not the case. In fact, it is generally believed that “black students attending predominantly white



institutions are alienated and maladjusted and, thus, do not benefit from the college experience at levels comparable to white students” (Watson & Kuh, 1996, p. 415).

However, according to Watson and Kuh (1996) in their “own dominant-race environment,” African-American students are much more involved in campus social activities, gained more from the educational experience, and perceived such environments to be much more supportive of their social and psychological needs (p. 415).

Allen (1992) employed a quantitative study to investigate differences in the experiences of African-American students at historically black and predominantly white colleges and universities. One of the findings of his study suggests that the college racial composition has a direct influence on the extent to which students become involved in campus social activities. Specifically, he noted that

students attending predominantly white institutions report substantially lower levels of social involvement. Those who believe that they made the right college choice also report greater social involvement, and those who report positive faculty relationships and feel positive about their connections to peers of both races have the greatest social involvement. (p. 35)

Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (1991) reported that to survive socially in a predominantly white college environment, black students often find it necessary to “fight back against the degrading racism they face by developing a collective social and cultural identity that is not merely different from the stance of the white majority . . . but in opposition to it” (p. 14). To accomplish this objective, one of the strategies often employed by African-American students is to form socially segregated affinity groups which provided them with safety, security, and a sense of racial solidarity (Loo & Rolison, 1986). Because of the cultural dominance evident in most predominantly white

middle-class college environments, Loo and Rolison (1986) suggest that African-American students who attend such institutions often value self-segregation “as [a means of] cultural support within a larger unsupportive system” (p. 72).

Reflecting on the self-segregation occurring between black and white students at predominantly white colleges and universities, Pouncey (1993) asserts there is a climate of fumbling constraint about our exchanges. We are not yet at home with each other, so we keep making awkward gestures and arrangements toward one another as though we were dealing with sets of particularly difficult, foreign guests. (p. 57)

A critical factor influencing the self-segregation of African-American students at predominantly white institutions is the issue of ethnic identity development. According to Yinger (1976),

“ethnic identity is identification with a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and to share segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients” (p. 200).

Person and Christensen (1996) investigated black student culture at a predominantly white liberal arts university in eastern Pennsylvania. The findings from their study suggest that African-American students valued the black community, were eager to participate in black-oriented programs and campus-sponsored celebrations of black culture, and spent a great deal of time engaged in social interactions, but mainly with other black students. Person and Christensen also found that African-American students joined affinity “groups to support each other and to celebrate publicly their history and culture and to address racial identity developmental issues” (p. 55). Although Person and Christensen believed that a number of factors contributed to this



phenomenon, of critical importance was the fact that African-American students were generally dissatisfied with the overall campus social environment.

Although African-American students “are often forced to create their own social and cultural networks in response to their exclusion from the wider” white campus environment, university officials at such institutions do not fully understand the importance of affinity groups to the success and survival of African-American students (Kenny & Perez, 1996, p. 527). In fact, in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, Cross (1998/1999) noted that “university administrators have little interest in supporting racial affinity groups whose presence on campus often leads to discord and discomfort for academic administrations” (p. 51).

However, in her book Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?, Tatum (1997) asserts that self-segregation is not a problem that we should try to fix. Instead, this coping strategy is one that all predominantly white institutions should support and encourage in an effort to ensure the successful transition of students of color into the campus environment. Additionally, Fisher and Hartmann (1995) suggest that, “to the extent that these groups can provide a secure base from which students can safely reach out toward integrated experiences, they may be a positive force for social change” (p. 125).

### Summary Statement

This literature review was designed to provide an analysis of the relationship between selected demographic factors and the social integration of African-American students’ in a predominantly white college environment. It should not be assumed that



all African-American students share the same social perceptions of or experiences within such an environment (Eimers & Pike, 1997). Nor should it be assumed that all African-American students interpret their perceptions of campus climate in a similar manner. While African-American students may encounter similar social experiences, they differ with respect to such characteristics as family social background, self-esteem, racial identity.

From this analysis, it is evident that within the immediate family environment from which black students matriculate, the quality of relationships within the family, and the interest and the expectations parents have for their students' educational development are important factors contributing to their persistence toward degree completion. It is also evident that the demographic characteristics that describe the self-concept and racial identity development of individual African-American students are critical factors influencing their perceptions of social integration and their social interactions within the college environment.

Of all the demographic factors influencing the social integration of African-American students within a predominantly white college environment, issues of race and racial identity were most critical. In fact, for most African-American students at predominantly white institutions, racism is one of the truisms of college life, influencing not only their growth and development during college, but also how they perceive and experience the campus environment (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995; Gloria, Kupius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999). Thus, it is difficult to fully understand their perceptions of campus life without considering the impact of racism on their social integration, their

involvement in campus social activities, and their interactions with peers, faculty, and other members of the campus community.

Unfortunately, we live in a society where many have come to believe in the insignificance of race, and that racism is not a factor influencing attrition among African-American students at predominantly white institutions (Cross, 1997). For example, Weissberg (1997), a political science professor at the University of Illinois, suggested that racism does not have a negative affect on the academic performance and persistence of African-American students. Writing in The Weekly Standard, Weissberg (1997) stated there is currently “no scientific research [that] demonstrates how white racism incapacitates black” students (p. 19).

Despite Weissberg’s comments, the evidence is abundantly clear. From racist graffiti and racial discrimination to racial slurs and hate mail messages to race-related threats and brawls, racial incidents directed towards African-American students appear to be increasing at many predominantly white colleges across the country (Cross, 2001). Siggelkow (1998) asserts that for many African-American students, the experience of campus racism is not just a reality of campus life. Instead, it is “a permanent condition that has serious implications for social and race relations in higher education and throughout American society” (p. 99).

In his research on racial integration in American, Wicker (1996) asserts that, despite the success of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, most African-Americans students have not fully experienced racial and social integration or first-class citizenship in American society. Fortunately, the most important developmental skills any African-American student can bring to a predominantly white college environment are the

messages, behaviors, and survival strategies communicated by their parents and significant members of their immediate social community, as part of the racial socialization process. Such skills are critical in helping them to develop a sense of identity, to maintain physical and emotional health, to become aware of the politics of race and racism in American, to understand the importance of a college education, and to take advantage of institutional programs and services that will allow them to become integrated into the campus environment.

## Section II: Pictorialization of Social Perceptions and Experiences

### Introduction

One of the objectives of this study is to pictorialize the social perceptions of the African-American community college transfer students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the main characters. The process of pictorializing students' social perceptions will be accomplished through a series of story boards that reflect the researcher's attempt to provide a visual interpretation of some of the themes and social experiences that emerged from students' personal narratives. Additionally, the process of story boarding students' social perceptions will be accomplished using characters from the Afrocentric comic strip, College Norms.

Currently, there is limited research on the use of comic strips as a medium for illustrating the social experiences of college students. However, this sections provides a review of some of the literature on the historical, sociological, and educational value of



comic strips and other pictorial art as an important means of documenting and communicating the sociocultural experiences of a given society.

### Pictorial Art: An Historical Perspective

The use of pictorials to provide an intimate and graphic presentation of one's personal, social, and cultural experiences is not new phenomenon. In fact, "from the early Paleolithic until the Neolithic periods (35,000 B.C. to 4000 B.C.), early people of Africa and Europe left drawings and paintings in caves" (Meggs, 1983, p. 4). Many of these images, which included petroglyphs, pictographs, and even ideographs, were created for utilitarian and ritualistic purposes and served to document the experiences of prehistoric man.

In ancient Egypt, pictorials were used as part of a system of writing known as hieroglyphs (Putnan, 1994). This system, which used pictorial symbols to represent words or sounds, recorded important events in the lives of the Egyptian people, from the pharaohs and their royal families to peasant farmers who served the kings of Egypt. Documenting such events as births, accessions, wars, deaths, marriages, and of course various gods and animals worshipped by the Egyptians, these pictorials played an important role in providing a written and visual history of Egyptian life (Putnan, 1994).

Similarly, the Aztecs, Maya, Incas, and other ancient civilizations of Mesoamerica and South America distinguished themselves by employing pictorials in a hieroglyphic system of writings (Baquedano, 1993). Through the use of this picture-writing system, pictorials were used to document every aspect of life among the peoples of this region, including their social, political, religious, and cultural history.

In North America, pictorial narratives were also used by the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Kiowa, Lakota and other American Indians of the Great Plains. Many of the pictorial narratives employed by the native peoples of America captured and preserved significant tribal events that transformed their lives and culture after they came in contact with Europeans. Their pictorial narratives were illustrated in pictographic style on tipi liners, buffalo hides and robes, and even on the walls of various caves located throughout the Southwest.

From 1865 to 1935, a series of pictorial narratives were used to capture the beauty and significance of the Cheyenne Indian Nation in what has become known as ledger drawings (Ingalls, 1996, p. B8). These illustrations were named “ledger drawings” because they were “made on paper from the bound ledgers that soldiers and traders used to inventory their goods” (p. B8). Ledger drawings often captured the darker side of Native American life, illustrating sad and macabre scenes of death and dying resulting from various wars between American soldiers and such Indian nations as the Cheyenne. Many other ledger drawings, however, pictorialized the elegance and beauty surrounding intimate aspects of tribal life as reflected in various courting rituals, ceremonies, and sacred dances. In either case, ledger drawings have helped to preserve the perceptions and experiences of Native Americans who lived many centuries ago.

### Pictorial Art as a Means of Communication

While the development of writing and visible language had its earliest origins in pictorials, this simple but prehistoric method of recording experiences, communicating ideas, and transmitting information has not always been understood (Meggs, 1983). In

fact, researchers are still trying to discover how prehistoric man perceived and understood the numerous prehistoric visual communications recorded in caves from Africa to North America to the islands of New Zealand.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of how pictures can be used as a medium of communication, Walker (1979) conducted a qualitative study using largely unschooled, rural adult subjects in Nepal. Specifically, his study was designed to “investigate the subjects’ understanding of topological, euclidean, and projective concepts, both with regard to real objects and to pictures” (p. vii).

In an exhibition of her research on photographs as a form of visual meditation and personal discovery, Black (1997) reflected on the memories of “family, friends, stories, names, and dates that are attached to the pictures” in her family album (p. B112).

Although these pictures provided visual images of the people and relationships Black has known well, she admitted that “beyond the names, dates, and places, the stories hiding just beneath the surface of the pictures are hard to confront and accept, much less to relate to others” (p. B112).

Researching the intellectual side of pictorial images, Stafford (1997) asserted that “you can get more information, more memorably, quickly, and in greater detail in images than in written words” (p. B6). Yet, according to Stafford, “old fears about pictures that trick are once again obscuring the intellectual side of graphics” (p. B6).

### Pictorial Art in the College Admissions Process

Despite the importance of pictorials in the everyday lives of people, there is an absence of research on the use of pictorials as a medium to illustrate the social



perceptions and experiences of African-American students in a predominantly white college environment. Yet, quite frequently, predominantly white institutions integrate pictorials of African-American students in their viewbooks, catalogs, and other promotional materials. Designed to enhance the admissions recruitment and marketing process, these pictorials often give the impression that African-American students are well integrated into the college communities in which they are enrolled, satisfied with the experiences of campus life, and committed to the task of completing a baccalaureate degree.

Although prospective college students frequently are impressed with the colorful pictorial essay used in the admissions recruitment process, these publications do not always accurately present the realities of college life for African-American students at predominantly white colleges and universities. Nor do they give a clear understanding of the various adjustment issues (i.e., academic, social, psychological, etc.) confronting African-American students in their attempt to become integrated within the campus environment.

### Pictorial Expressions Through Comic Strips

In this research study, the glossy pictures used in college viewbooks will not be used to illustrate the social perceptions and experiences of African-American community college transfer students. Instead, this process will be accomplished using various characters from the Afrocentric comic strip College Norms.

The idea of employing a comic strip to illustrate the social perceptions and experiences of African-American students in a predominantly white college, was based

on the fact that “the graphic elucidation of detail and background [of comic strips] can tell a story in more economic terms” (Horn, 1971, p. 12). Additionally, comic strips have been recognized as an effective communication tool because they are less intimidating and more inviting, less theoretical and more practical, less restricting and more inclusive.

Today, comic strips are read by millions of people from all ages and all walks of life, including college students. On many college campuses, they are one of the most popular and enjoyed forms of popular culture (Berger, 1971). As a dynamic and formative means of communication, comic strips are composed of several irreducible elements. Included among these elements is “a succession of panels (in contrast to a single panel); a story that is told (not a vignette illustrated); a written language enclosed in dialogue balloons and placed within the image frame, serving somehow a visual as well as narrative function” (Marschall, 1989, p. 9). As “an open-ended dramatic narrative about a recurring set of characters,” comic strips are often presented through mass media (Inge, 1990, p. xi).

According to Coughlin (1990), “the first comic strip, Richard F. Outcault’s The Yellow Kid, appeared in the New York World in 1886” (p. A5). Since then, comic strips have been published nationally in syndication or weekly newspapers, making them one of the most widely read forms of mass entertainment in American society (Berger, 1971). They have even “come to compete with and even displace older forms of popular literature, such as the dime novels, the pulps, [and] the magazine serials” (Horn, 1971, p. 12).

As a form of graphic art, comic strips contains some of the same basic elements as cartoons and illustrations. Yet, unlike cartoons and illustrations which “concentrate on

only one point, whether a punch line or the dramatic highlight in a narrative, comic [strips] must keep up the continuity of a whole sequence” (Horn, 1971, p. 12).

As narrative literature, the essence of a comic strip is simply to tell a story in graphic terms. Generally, comic strips contain some of the same elements of a short story, including characters, dialogue, plot, conflict, and climax. Yet, according to Wright (1975), “by no stretch of the imagination can comic strips be called great literature” (p. 159).

As a dramatic form, “the dialogue in comic strips constitutes the strongest and most prominent literary feature of the comics” (p. 12). In his research on the historical development of comic strips, Horn (1971) asserts that most cartoonists have used the dialogue to “convey essential information; to carry the plot forward; to establish the character and motivation; to create suspense and anticipation; to reveal the central themes and ideas of their work; to establish tone and rhythm; and to give purpose to the action” (p 12).

From an historical perspective, comic strips have been written, illustrated, and read for a variety of reasons, not just for their ideological or their sociological content. In fact, Burger (1971) notes that “readers use the comics for a variety of purposes such as: including escapism, gaining information about society and human relationships, vicarious experiences, nostalgia for childhood days, and the working through of psychological problems” (p. 168).

Inge (1976) noted that comic strips have also “served as revealing reflectors of popular attitudes, tastes, and mores” for a given society (p. 16). And, if one were to examine the comic strips appearing in any daily newspaper, one would observe



perceptions of universally accepted social values, ideologies or standards of behavior commonly held by various members of society.

As a form of communication, comic art has long been used in advertisement, as propaganda, as a means of cultural expression, and as purveyor of capitalist values. For example, social scientists have long believed that “countries with global economic dominance reinforce their hegemonic relationship on to lesser developed countries through the manipulation of mass media such as television, radio, film, and comic books” (Flora, 1985, p. 163).

In her research on the mass culture in Latin America, Flora (1985) examined comic books and photonovels (a kind of photocomic) from such countries as Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru which have been known to use comic strips as a “prime purveyor of ideological hegemony of foreign capital and cultural interest” (p. 163). She found that in an effort to encourage social change, to raise political consciousness, and to encourage economic independence, various forms of mass culture, including comic books and photonovels, are being produced and distributed through grass roots organizations.

### The Sociological Value of Comic Strips

Despite the utilization of some comic strips and comic books “as a prime purveyor of ideological hegemony of foreign capital and cultural interest,” the sociological importance of this form of mass media has been critical in helping individuals to think analytically about the world around them (Flora, 1985). In fact, many comic strips/books devote attention to such social issues as “ racism, unchecked

power, drugs, cultural conflict, organized crime,” and various social health issues (Cohan, 1975, p. 325).

More recently, comic art, including comic books and daily newspaper comic strips, has contributed significantly to our understanding of AIDS and AIDS related issues. Researchers such as McAllister (1992) strongly believe that comic strips and other forms of mass communication and popular culture can be an extremely effective tool for intervening in the AIDS crisis. According to McAllister:

“comic books can and have contributed positively to the discourse about AIDS: images that encourage true education, understanding and compassion can help cope with a biomedical condition which has more than a biomedical relevance” (p. 22).

In addition to the sociological value of comic strips in helping to promote health related issues, the contents that dominate the themes of many comic strips and the look and personalities of the characters depicted in these graphic narratives are becoming more multicultural. It should be noted, however, that “Afrocentric and multicultural comics are far from new to” comic strips and comic books (Brown, 1994, p. 84). For example, the short-lived All Negro Comics first appeared in June, 1947 with the expressed intent of providing the black community with characters and a story line with which they could identify (Brown, 1994). Additionally, between 1965 and 1972, cartoonist Charles Johnson published more than a thousand cartoons in such publications as Ebony Magazine, Jet Magazine, the Chicago Tribune, and Black World, as a commentary on racial politics. His drawings “showcase his phenomenological and daring satiric aesthetic during the Black Power Movement of the late sixties and early seventies” (Little, 1996, p. 579).

However, the early “ creators, writers, editors, and artists of comic strips and comic books have always been white males” (Brown, 1994, p. 88). Unfortunately, because “they possessed only a limited understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, the few black characters they created in their comic strips/books, ranged from the culturally out of touch to the blatantly stereotypical” (p. 88).

In her research on the changing face of blacks appearing in cartoons that were published in the New Yorker between 1946-1987, Thibodeau (1989) found that racism and racial stereotypes played a critical role in the way black characters were depicted in the cartoons published during this period. According to Thibodeau,

“all cartoons from the earliest period presented U.S. blacks in stereotypic occupational roles, cartoons in the late 1960s and early 1970s were dominated by racial themes, and blacks appeared in token roles in the majority of cartoons from the most recent period investigated” (p. 882).

Today, however, a wave of black independent publishers, including Milestone Media, have begun to revolutionize the comic book industry with such strong black superheroes as:

Blood Syndicate, a multiethnic super-powered street gang; Icon, a brother from another planet who started out on Earth as a slave and is now a conservative black attorney and superhero; and Hardware, a technological genius who challenges the corrupt and racist employer who exploits him and his inventions (Brown, 1984, p. 85).

The black characters created by Milestone Media and other black independent publishing comic book publishing companies are being developed with the understanding that “the audience for comics is a truly multicultural one. In fact, it is more ethnically diverse than are the heroes the young people read about” (Brown, 1999, p. 26). Thus, besides striving to employ more black artist and writers, “the mission of most black comic book publishers is to [produce comic strips/books] with more



authentic characters and provide positive role models” for fans from diverse cultural backgrounds (Brown, 1994, p. 88).

Despite the racial and ethnic characteristics of the characters in today’s comic strips or the ideology they promote, philosophers have never given serious attention to the theoretical implications and potential of comic art (Coleman, 1985). Instead, comic strips and comic books have often been devalued, denigrated, and freely characterized as being simple, trivial or just an imaginative world for only children (Burger, 1971).

In his research, Coleman (1985), notes that even now, “there is enough of a stigma attached to the comic strip that the New York Times refuses to print one. The very label comics can subtly affect one’s estimate of such publications, because, since the time of Aristotle, tragedy has been esteemed over comedy” (p. 89).

### Educational Value of Comic Art

Yet researchers such as Abbott (1986) have tried to expose the artistic potentialities and educational value of the pictorial and literary elements of comic art. In fact, Abbott tried “to formulate the concepts of visual-verbal relationships in comic art that are needed for evaluating the artistic potentialities of this narrative medium” (p. 155).

Also searching for the educational value of comic strips, Wright (1975), notes that this form of graphic art lend themselves well to the development of new teaching strategies and scholarship not only in the elementary or secondary schools, but on the college level as well. As an educator, Cohan (1975) suggests that comic strips can be used in the classroom as an effective tool to assist students in learning how to read and

write, to discuss violence in contemporary society, to understand a society's heroes and villains, and even create their own comic books.

Richie (1979) also believes that comics and cartoons can be used in the classroom to individualize instruction. He asserts that comic/cartoons lend themselves well to helping students to "develop their skills of interpretation as well as writing and punctuation skills" (p. 127).

Finally, Cosby (1976) explored the integration and effectiveness of the televised cartoon film series "Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids," into the elementary school curriculum as a teaching aid. Of particular concern was the utilization of this medium as a means to combat institutional racism. His research led to the development of "an alternative source of instructional materials to aid elementary classroom teachers in creating a more positive learning environment as well as an environment that is free from racial bias and prejudice" (p. viii).

The value and interest of a number of educational institutions in the development of comic art and their pictorial-verbal presentation of narrative has given them a renewed sense of legitimacy. This sense of legitimacy extends well into the collegiate environment where the narrative and graphic aspects of comic art and other pictorials are being used as instrument for teaching and learning. For example, in their four-year research on how graduate students develop into faculty members, Nyquist et al. (1999) instructed participants to reflect on their graduate school experience, both "visually and with words" (p. 18). From the personal narratives of participating students, a number of themes emerged, including those which revealed a misunderstanding of academic culture, conflicts with educational values and

expectations, and a sense of disillusionment with the teaching profession. Additionally, the poignant images depicted in the personal drawings of individual students contained elements of “uncertainty, self-doubt, insecurity, personal embarrassment, feelings of isolation, and hopelessness” (p. 19). Together, the narratives and drawings reveal the personal struggles endured by students in their journeys to become teaching scholars.

### Summary Statement

In recent years, a number of scholarly books have been published that view comic art as a serious form of art, narrative, and cultural expression. Thus, as researchers continue to look for the historical, imperialistic, or sociological effects of, and the messages, in such comic strips as “Batman” and “Donald Duck,” comic scholarship will fast become a reality on many college campuses. This is evident in the fact that institutions such as Michigan State University, Ohio State University, and Columbia University have all committed various resources (i.e., comprehensive archives, research initiatives, and even academic conferences) to the study of comic strips and cartoon art (Coughlin, 1990, p. A8).

The legitimacy of comic art, however, extends well beyond the classroom and the college campus and into some of the country’s criminal institutions. For example, at the Bristol County Correctional Facility in New Bedford Massachusetts, “inmates, their sentences served, leave a place they have called home for months, even years, and venture back into society” (Duciou, 1999, p. 1). However, on the walls of the Kempton Street jail, these men leave behind pictorial drawings and even comic art that clearly reflect the various social adjustments that have changed their lives since entering prison.



In many respects, these drawings illustrate the social and psychological adjustments that are real, yet often invisible to most of society. Yet like the cave pictorials left by prehistoric man, the hieroglyphs and other pictorial symbols used by the Egyptians, and the ledger drawings of the Cheyenne Indians, the pictorial drawing and narratives of the Kempton Street prisoners all reveal stories about life at a given moment in time.

In this study, the pictorials and personal narratives that have been captured through the process of story boarding provide a graphic illustration of the perceptions and experiences of African-American community college students at a given moment in time. This methodology will be critical in helping others to gain a better understanding, visually and in writing, of the difficult adjustment issues experienced by African-American students in a predominantly white college environment.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions and experiences of social integration among African-American community college transfer students at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. In this study, social integration was defined as peer interactions, student-faculty interactions, classroom interactions, interactions in the residence halls, informal peer group associations, and involvement in campus social activities.

This chapter provides rationale for the use of a qualitative research methodology in the completion of this study. It also provides a description of the research design, the selection of student participants, and the methodology for collecting, managing, and analyzing the data.

A second objective of this study was to provide an illustrative analysis of students' perceptions of social integration, as described in their personal narratives, using characters from the comic strip College Norms. Therefore, this Chapter also provides background information on the development, design, and illustration of the story board.

#### Rationale for Qualitative Research

This study used an in-depth qualitative research methodology to explore students' perceptions and experiences of social integration. This methodology is quite

popular among students affairs administrators, many of whom believe that it is most effective at capturing the nuances and details of the quality of student life in a college environment (Whitt, 1991).

An in-depth qualitative research methodology was also used because of the belief that in-depth interviewing has “the potential to more accurately describe and even help student affairs, faculty, and others to better understand the behavior of individual students and groups of students” (Kuh & Andreas, 1991, p. 397). According to Seidman, (1991), “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3).

Despite the popular use of qualitative research, and the confidence of some student affairs administrators in the use of this methodology, a true definition of qualitative research is difficult to achieve. Whitt (1991) asserts that qualitative research is rooted in “many different disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and feminist studies” (p. 406). Yet Rubin and Rubin (1995) note that qualitative research is most often characterized as “a philosophy, an approach to learning . . . about people's feelings, thoughts, and experiences” (p. 2).

In this study, one of the advantages of using in-depth interviewing was the ability to probe more deeply into how individual students perceive, understand, and give meaning to the experience of social integration in a predominantly white college environment. From the dialectic conversations that occurred during the in-depth interview process, the realities of social integration, as told by individual students, were transcribed, organized into categories, and studied holistically for emerging patterns or themes.



However, it was only after reading, rereading, marking, and labeling each marked passage of the transcripts that I was able to “build interpretative categories . . . developed from the experience of the participants as represented in the interviews” (Seidman, 1991, p. 101). From these interpretative categories, profiles that provided an understanding of how participants, individually and collectively, perceive or give meaning to their social perceptions and experiences were developed.

### The Research Setting

This research study took place at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, a predominantly white public co-educational institution located on a 710-acre campus between the cities of Fall River and New Bedford, Massachusetts. Historically, UMass Dartmouth traces its roots to the New Bedford Textile School and the Bradford Durfee Textile School. According to Cass (1967), both schools were established in 1895, by a charter of the Massachusetts State legislature, for the expressed purpose of educating immigrant workers in both the expanding textile mills and in the cranberry industry in southeastern Massachusetts.

Today, UMass Dartmouth offers a broad range of graduate and undergraduate programs, while supporting and encouraging scholarship, basic and applied research, and creative productions in the arts and letters. The average class size at UMass Dartmouth, including independent study arrangements, is 17 students, with only 2% of instructional class sections taught by teaching assistants. Of the 319 full-time faculty members currently employed at UMass Dartmouth, only 3% are African-American.

Throughout its history, UMass Dartmouth has provided equality of educational opportunity to the diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural peoples of southeastern Massachusetts. In fact, the university's strategic initiatives assert the need to strengthen student outreach efforts and collaboration with schools and community colleges; encourage and support the educational aspirations of under-represented student populations; and ease transfer among institutions, while offering flexible programs for working adults (University Catalogue, 2000, p. 6).

Because of its commitment to equality of opportunity, UMass Dartmouth has managed to maintain a diverse population of students. Although many of these students matriculate from various cities and towns throughout New England and around the world, UMass Dartmouth remains committed to the peoples of southeastern Massachusetts. From this region of the state, UMass Dartmouth enrolls an average of 1900 students from the racially diverse urban cities of Fall River, New Bedford, Brockton, and Boston, Massachusetts.

In recent years, the enrollment of students of color at UMass Dartmouth has increased significantly. For example, between 1985 and 1989 students of color represented only about 4% of the approximately 5,500 undergraduate students enrolled at the university (Affirmative Action Plan, 1989). In September, 1999, there were 586 students of color enrolled at the university, representing approximately 12.2% of the 5,420 undergraduate student body.

#### Purposive Sampling: Identifying the Characters and their Stories

Participants in this study were 16 community college transfer students who self-identified as African-Americans in the admissions application process. In identifying

students to participate in this study, care was taken to ensure heterogeneity. In other words, from among the small group of African-American community college transfer students enrolled at the university, this study was inclusive of students from diverse backgrounds and experiences, including residential status, enrollment status, prior college experiences, age, gender, and involvement in on-campus activities.

Initially, there was concern about the limited number of students who would be participating in this study. However, Seidman (1991) posited that “the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (p. 45).

In this study, care was also taken to ensure the inclusion of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as negative cases, or the selection of some participants who cannot be characterized as typical. The inclusive nature of this study will "allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading" (p. 42).

In selecting individuals to participate in this study, only African-American community college students who had earned 12 academic credits or more before transferring to the university were included. African-American students who identified with their biracial heritage were considered negative cases because many of them do not share a common perspective on black issues. Yet it was expected that their perspective would be helpful in clarifying perceptions of social integration among African-American community college transfer students in a predominantly white college environment.



## Entry and Gate Keeping

The first step in the student selection process involved the development of a list of potential participants. This was accomplished through consultation with various gatekeepers or “people who have power to grant access” to students who could potentially meet the selection criteria (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 31). At UMass Dartmouth, selected faculty and administrators in the offices of student life, admissions, institutional research, and College Now proved to be extremely helpful at identifying potential students.

Initial consultation with gatekeepers in the admissions office provided the researcher with access to the transfer admissions file. This file contained the personal essays written by transfer students as part of the application process. In their essays, students quite often reveal background experiences that influence their decision to attend the university. Thus, a review of the personal essays written by African-American community college transfer students revealed information-rich stories about their educational expectations, career aspirations, previous college experiences, and family backgrounds.

Another strategy used to develop a potential list of student participants involved peer referral. In other words, the researcher conferred with currently enrolled African-American students who were able to recommend transfer students most appropriate for the study. Finally, seeing that the researcher has been employed at UMass Dartmouth for over 20 years, consultation with colleagues and personal friends also helped to identify potential students.

### Contact and Informed Consent

During February 2000, a mailing list containing the names and addresses of 36 African-American community college transfer students, enrolled in their first-year at UMass Dartmouth, was obtained from the registrar's office. These students were initially selected because they had earned less than 30 academic credits at the university.

In March 2000, the 36 students in this list received a letter inviting them to attend a general information session about a study of social adjustment experiences of African-American students. The purpose of this session was to provide students with detailed information on the nature of the study, to clarify the research process and expectations, and to begin developing the foundation for a successful relationship based on trust, understanding, and sensitivity to the needs of participants and the researcher.

At the general information session, which was attended by 27 of the 36 first-year African-American community college transfer students, attendees were assured of their anonymity, and reminded that their participation in this study was voluntary and confidential (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The information session also provided the researcher with an opportunity to collect background demographic data on individual students (Seidman, 1991).

The general information session also provided the researcher with the opportunity to begin the process of informed consent with the 16 students ultimately selected to participate in this study. This process included having participants to read and sign an official document indicating that they understood the nature of the study and that they voluntarily agreed to participate in the research project (Seidman, 1991).

The consent form also detailed information on the time, place, date, and location of the in-depth interview sessions. Finally, the general information session helped to facilitate the identification and selection of the African-American community college transfer students who could provide the widest possible range of "information-rich stories" about their experience of becoming socially integrated into the university community (Patton, 1990).

At the end of the general information session, 20 of the attendees volunteered to participate in the study. However, after carefully reviewing the demographic information and prior educational experiences of each of the 20 volunteers, only 16 of them were selected to participate in the study. These students were selected because they were: a) enrolled in their first year at the university; b) attended a community college for at least one year (2 semesters) prior to enrolling at UMass Dartmouth; c) identified themselves as either African-American or Black in the admissions application process; and d) were enrolled full-time in a degree program. The four volunteers not selected to participate in this study failed to meet all of this criteria.

#### Data Collection: Developing a Script for the Stories

Once the 16 African-American community college transfer students were selected and the consent forms signed, the researcher scheduled the first interview sessions. Most contemporary guidelines on conducting qualitative in-depth interviews suggest three 90-minute interview sessions. Within this framework, it is recommended that the first interview session focus on the participants' life history, followed by a session that allows students to reconstruct the details of their experiences, and a final a



session that enables them to reflect on the meaning of such experiences (Seidman, 1991). However, according to Seidman (1991), “there is nothing magical or absolute about this time frame” (p. 13).

In this study, the researcher employed a methodology that allowed for the collection of data in only two 60 minute individual interview sessions with the 16 participating students. These individual sessions took place during Spring Semester 2000 on the campus of UMass Dartmouth in a location that was most convenient for the students and the researcher.

As recommended, the initial 60 minute interview sessions focused on students’ life history. It began with participants being asked to tell as much as possible about themselves, including their family backgrounds, racial identity, previous college experiences, educational development, career aspirations, and factors that influenced their decision to attend UMass Dartmouth.

A week after the initial individual interview sessions, the 16 students participated in the second 60 minute individual interview session. These individual interviews allowed participating students to reconstruct their present experiences, to describe their perceptions of social life at UMass Dartmouth, and to reflect on the meaning of their campus social experiences. Throughout the first and second individual interview sessions, students were asked for stories as a way of eliciting details about their background experiences and their social perceptions of the university. The questions that guided the second individual interview process are indicated below.

1. Did you attend transfer orientation?
2. What were your perceptions of orientation?

3. What experiences, beginning with orientation, made it easy for you to become socially integrated into campus life?
4. What experiences, beginning with orientation, made it difficult for you to become socially integrated into campus life?
5. How would you describe your social interactions with other African-American students on campus?
6. What did those interactions mean to you?
7. How would you describe your social interactions with white students on campus?
8. What did those interactions mean to you?
9. What activities are you involved in on campus?
10. Describe personal background experiences that have influenced your involvement in campus social activities.
11. How does the university support African-American students in adjusting socially to the university?
12. Discuss social adjustments you experienced as a result of living on campus (residential students only).
13. Discuss social adjustments you experienced as a result of commuting to campus (commuter students only).
14. Discuss your relationship with administrative staff and faculty, including faculty academic advisors.
15. Describe your classroom interactions with faculty and student peers.

16. What strategies do you employ to successfully cope with difficult social adjustment issues?

As with all qualitative research, the questions asked during the interview sessions were intended to "be general enough to permit exploration but focused enough to delimit the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1998, p. 40). According to Marshall and Rossman (1998), flexibility in the design of the study and in the development of appropriate research questions should always remain the hallmark characteristics of qualitative research.

In addition to the research questions, there were a number of other factors that helped to establish the boundaries or limitations of this study. These factors included limiting the research to: (a) 16 African-Americans; (b) undergraduate students; (c) community college transfers in their first-year at the university; and (d) the researcher's assumptions and values about social transition and adjustment in a predominantly white college environment.

During the interview process, students were allowed to share their "perceptions freely rather than be compelled to respond to measures with predetermined or pre-established norms" (Hughes, 1987, p. 536). The qualitative process of listening to what students had to say about their perceptions and experiences of social integration in a predominantly white college environment allowed them to speak for themselves, and to give voice to their own understanding of what social integration means to them.



### Managing the Data for the Script

The data collected during the in-depth interviews were in the form of words, words that described students' perceptions of their social experiences in a predominantly white college environment. As expected, the process of collecting and analyzing this data proved to be a difficult and time-consuming experience (Patton, 1990). However, the entire process, beginning with conceptualization of the study, was systematically organized and consciously planned to ensure that the research allowed for the emergence of grounded theory.

Grounded theory, which is expressed in the interpretations, explanations, and conclusions drawn from the research, "reflects more the multiple constructions of reality that permeate the context-embedded data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 145). In analyzing the student's constructs of reality, care was taken to diligently and thoroughly mark passages in the data collected by using a coding scheme that identified emerging themes and patterns which could be categorized to reflect meaningful experiences.

The data collected through the in-depth interview process are presented using a novelistic format with each student assuming the position of storyteller. As a research methodology, storytelling is frequently used in higher education. According to Seidman (1990), the way in which individual students frame or structure their stories should allow those who read them to "enter into the other's stream of consciousness and experience what he or she had" experienced (p. 3). Furthermore, "the language of storytelling offers a sense of the peculiar, a feeling for the richly complex, a recognition of the role of character and the special interplay within one group of people" (Keller, 1983, p. 110).

Although storytelling is often viewed by social scientists as a “pre-scientific remnant,” it adds something indispensable to our view of reality (Keller, 1983, p. 110). In this study, the realities constructed by students were presented as a case study written in a novelistic manner. Organized thematically, this style of presentation allowed the stories of individual students to be described and communicated in a way that revealed their emotions, their perceptions, and their experience of becoming socially integration in the college environment. In conceptualizing the novelistic approach and the development of the story boards, I tried carefully "to build understanding inductively, from the data, rather than deductively, from a priori hypotheses or categories" (Whitt, 1991, p. 408).

While it is sometimes difficult to separate the process of collecting and analyzing data, care was taken to ensure that the data analysis process did not begin until the entire interviewing process was complete. Additionally, I refrained from judging or "imposing meaning from one participant's interview on the next" early on in the data collection process (Seidman, 1991, p. 86).

The initial step in the data analysis process was to transcribe the first and second tape-recorded interview sessions with the 16 participating students into written text. This process occurred in June, 2000. However, data collected during the third interview sessions with the “main characters” was transcribed in September, 2000.

The analysis of the narrative information collected during the first, second, and third interview sessions was accomplished by breaking down the words of each participant into sound bites. According to Miller (1996), “a sound bite is a quote or phase that can stand on its own and has meaning in the absence of any additional

information” (p. 86). By identifying sound bites in the words of each participant, the narrative data was then categorized so that the researcher could sort out the social perceptions and experiences that were critically importance to student.

In addition to listening for sound bites, the researchers also listened for and recorded other sounds or interruptions that occurred during the interview sessions. The fact that the interviews were audio taped greatly enhanced the process of preparing “a detailed and careful transcript that recreated the verbal and non-verbal material of the interview” (Seidman, 1991, p. 88). By following this process, any “researcher who may be studying the transcript months after the interview occurred” can fully understand the perceptions and experiences of each individual participants as told in their own voice (Seidman, 1991, p. 88).

Throughout the data analysis process, I exercised my own judgement about key elements of the transcript that were important to the research under investigation. However, I kept in mind that my approach to the transcription of data could not be infused with bias or prejudice. Instead, I had to enter this process with an open mind, allowing the respondents' constructs of reality to emerge freely and without reservations.

The narrative profiles of individual African-American community college students, as developed from the tape recorded in-depth interview session allowed them to tell their own stories in their own words. Additionally, the qualitative methodology employed in this study allowed “the researcher to listen to the stories of individual students and to build a picture of their social perceptions and experiences within the college environment” (Creswell, 1994).



### Sketching the Story Boards

The objective of this qualitative in-depth interview process was to understand the experience of social integration from the students' perspective. A secondary purpose was to develop a series of story boards that reflected the researcher's interpretation of the social perceptions and experiences that emerged from the narrative data collected in the individual interviews with participating students.

To accomplish this objective, at the conclusion of the second interview session, four of the participating students were selected to serve as the "main characters" in the development of the story boards. These four students were identified as the "main characters" because of their diverse level of involvement in campus social activities and their detailed "information-rich stories" about the experience of becoming socially integrated into campus life. Finally, these four students were selected as the "main characters" because they were the only ones who agreed to be available in August, 2000 when the development of the story boards would begin.

In September, 2000, the four "main characters" participated in a follow-up interview session. The purpose of this 60 minute session was to meet with each of the students individually, and to allow them to provide feedback on the accuracy and presentation of the story boards. In reviewing these illustrations, the four "main characters" were free to: (a) share additional information about their social experiences at the university; (b) put these experiences in the context of their lives; and (c) reflect on the meaning of their experiences as they began the fall semester.

As recommended in the literature, the story boards were illustrated in such a way as to "display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experience, to

share the coherence the participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experience to the college environment” in a more natural and realistic presentation (Seidman, 1991, p. 92). The story boards were also structured around specific themes identified in the data analysis process and determined by the students to be meaningful experiences.

Excerpts from the individual transcripts were also categorically organized and presented as sound bites which illuminate “salient issues within individual profiles and the [thematic] connections among profiles” (Seidman, 1991, p. 99). Together, the sound bites and the illustrations helped to provide a visual image that is powerful, natural, and grounded in the realistic experiences of students in their attempt to become socially integrated into the college environment.

It should be noted that the illustrator of the storyboards was not present during the interview sessions with individual students. This precaution was taken for fear that their presence would be a distraction and violate the confidence and trust previously established between the researcher and student participants. However, during August, 2000, the illustrator was allowed to listen to the stories of individual students and to “build a picture based on their ideas” and social perceptions of a predominantly white college environment (Creswell, 1994, p. 21).

### Original Concept

The process of story boarding the social perceptions and experiences of participating students was accomplished using characters from the Afrocentric comic strip College Norms. From October, 1991 through May, 1994, College Norms appeared in the TORCH, the weekly student newspaper published at the University of

Massachusetts Dartmouth. Originally designed as a humorous but subtle approach to probe the realities of college life, College Norms complemented the developmental initiatives of traditional student support programs and services (i.e., counseling, orientation, academic advising, etc.) by reaching almost every students on campus.

At UMass Dartmouth, administrators and faculty often expressed their appreciation with the way in which College Norms was able to address developmental issues in a manner that was less intimidating and more inviting, less theoretical and more practical, less restricting and more inclusive. On the other hand, students were impressed with the way in which College Norms was able to discuss a variety of sensitive social adjustment issues on a level they could understand, appreciate, and enjoy.

In July, 1993, Barber, Rousseau, Quinn, & Maxwell published a compilation of illustrations from the weekly College Norms series in a comic book entitled College Norms: A Comical Essay on the Realities of College Life. This publication was distributed to first-year college students during the new student orientation programs. That fall, College Norms became increasingly popular among students throughout the campus. Because of its popularity, T-shirts depicting various characters from the College Norms collection were developed and offered for sale in the University's bookstore. Proceeds from the sale of these T-shirts helped to establish a scholarship fund for financially needy students.

Workshops on the use of College Norms as a methodology of illustrating the social perceptions and adjustment experiences of first-year students were presented at the Region IX Conference of the National Orientation Directors Association (January,



1992); the National Conference of National Orientation Directors Association (October, 1992); and the 12th Annual Conference of the Freshman Year Experience (February, 1993). In March, 1994, College Norms: A Comical Essay on the Realities of College Life received the "Most Creative Orientation Publication Award" from the Regional Association of the National Orientation Directors Association (N.O.D.A. Region IX).

In August, 1994, a second comic book entitled More College Norms: Another Comical Essay on the Realities of College Life was published by Barber, Rousseau, Quinn, & Maxwell. This publication was distributed to first-year students at the 1994 summer orientation programs, and received critical acclaim from entering students.

As with my colleagues at UMass Dartmouth and N. O. D. A., students who participated in the development of the story board felt that illustrating the social perceptions of African-American students can be an effective methodology for enhancing one's understanding of how black students perceive and experience the social environment of a predominantly white college. While it is almost impossible to illustrate all of the psychosocial adjustment issues associated with students' social perceptions and experiences, story boarding can be used effectively at identifying, sharing, and addressing various developmental and adjustment issues experienced by college students from racial, cultural, and educational backgrounds.

#### Original Illustrators of College Norms

The original illustrations and strip concepts appearing in the College Norms series were developed by several talented artists. All graduates of UMass Dartmouth, these artists included:

Bryant. Bryant graduated from UMass Dartmouth in 1991 with a degree in visual design and illustration. A former Editor-in-Chief of the TORCH (1989-1990), Bryant was also one of the creators of “Captain Condom,” a series of comic illustrations that promoted safe sex on campus. Because of his artistic abilities, Bryant was invited to help create and illustrate College Norms. He is currently working as a freelance designer in the Mid-west.

Jameson. Jameson graduated from UMass Dartmouth with a degree in graphic illustrations. While enrolled at the university, Jameson was director of campus design, a graphic department where he assumed responsibility for the design, layout, and production of advertisements for student clubs and organizations. Jameson was initially employed by the Office of New Student Programs to re-illustrate several of the original drawings and strip concepts illustrated by Bryant. However, because of his artistic abilities, Jameson later served as writer, artist, and design specialist for the College Norms collection series. In assuming various responsibilities associated with the production of College Norms, Jameson brought his own artistic style, sense of humor, and campus social experiences to the student development process.

Currently, Jameson is employed as a professional artist (penciler) for a major comic book distributor in Boston. Yet he remains a concerned alumnus and interested in developing story boards that provided a realistic presentation of campus life as perceived and experienced by students.

Gregory. Gregory graduated from UMass Dartmouth in 1993 with a degree in visual design and photography. Also a former Editor-in-Chief of the Torch (1991-1992), Gregory brought College Norms to life by agreeing to publish the series weekly

in the campus newspaper. Later, Gregory served as the publication design specialist for College Norms: A Comical Essay on the Realities of College Life (1991) and More College Norms: Another Comical Essay on the Realities of College Life (1994).

In this dissertation, all of the pictorials appearing in the story board were illustrated by Jameson. His artistic talents were utilized to ensure consistency in the artistic presentation of the researcher's interpretation of the social perceptions and experiences of the four African-American community college transfer students who were identifies in this study were as the "main characters."

### Reflectivity

As researchers, we all bring certain values and assumptions to the investigation of a particular research problem. In fact, our values and underlying assumptions significantly influence not only the conceptualization of the research project itself, but also the methodology we employ to investigate the inquiry. Thus, it is only by acknowledging and evaluating the influence of our values and assumptions on the research we are pursuing that we are able to achieve reflectivity. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), "being reflective builds an understanding of how the researcher shapes the context, data collected, and interpretations made instead of attempting to eliminate the effects of the researcher" (Miller, 1996, p. 79).

Throughout my personal and professional development, I have tried to work within the framework of my own values and assumptions about the experiences of African-American community college students at predominantly white four-year colleges and universities. In the completion of this research project, it was not my



intent to maintain a reflective journal or written documentation of my values and assumptions on the plight of African-American community college students. However, from time to time, I did find it necessary to maintain a separate audiotape of my thoughts and experiences on the interviewing process with individual participants. In doing so, I was able to remain consciously aware of my own disposition, its influence on student participants and my interpretation of the research data.

## CHAPTER 4

### AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

#### Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the perceptions of social integration of the 16 African-American community college transfer students who participated in this study. It begins with an analysis of each student's response to question #10 in which they described personal characteristics and background experiences that influenced their involvement in campus social activities at UMass Dartmouth. These factors include: a) family support and encouragement; b) self-concept; c) racial identity development; d) elementary and secondary school education; e) previous college experiences; and f) expectations about future educational attainment.

This chapter continues with an analysis of students' social experiences within the college environment, including their involvement in campus social activities and their interactions in the classroom and the residence halls and with faculty and with peers. Finally, because negative interpersonal interactions can have an adverse affect on the integration of students into the university community, this chapter also includes an analysis of the strategies students employ to cope with difficult social adjustment issues.

At the end of each of the sections in this chapter, a summary analysis highlights important issues and concerns that emerged from the personal narratives of individual students. In this analysis, pseudonyms have been given to university faculty, staff, students, and other professionals.

## Students' Personal Characteristics and Background Experiences

### The Four Main Characters

Crystal. Crystal was born in Jamaica. The youngest of three children, all girls, Crystal moved to the United States with her family when she was 10 years old. The family's move to the United States was initiated by the divorce of Crystal's parents and the validation of their divorce decree which gave equal visitation rights to her father who was living in Massachusetts. According to Crystal,

My father moved here and we followed afterwards. The courts ordered us to see our father who was now living in Springfield, Massachusetts. At the time, I didn't get along with my father. I loved him because he is my father. But to this day, I don't like him as a person because of the way he treated my mother.

Despite their divorce, Crystal's parents have always supported her in getting a good education. According to Crystal,

Education is the foundation of Jamaican culture and my parents have always stressed the importance of attending school. So, I've never forgotten the importance of education because Jamaicans stress education a lot. Actually, I think education is just a way of life in Jamaica. It's very important. Jamaicans think that education is the foundation for everything, which is true in a sense. But they stress it a lot and the teachers, they expect you to get an A in almost every class.

From an early age, Crystal and the other children in her neighborhood were encouraged to finish high school, to attend college, and to become financially independent in an effort to end the cycle of poverty that is common throughout Jamaica. The importance of being financially independent is a personal value that is treasured by Crystal.



I pay for my own education and my mother supports me. She encourages me to do well. But I've been on my own for a long time. Although my mother provides shelter and a place for me to lay my head when I go home, I consider myself independent. I started working when I was 13. I was always brought up to be very independent, which is why I tend to go out and do things for myself rather than ask people for help. I buy my own clothes because I work and I can afford to pay for them on my own. Even now, I sometimes work 30 hours a week at a temporary employment agency. I also have several baby-sitting jobs. I make good money, real good money, for a baby-sitter. That's why I'm self-sufficient.

Crystal's elementary education began in Jamaica at a predominantly white, middle-class, Catholic school. While at that school, Crystal was an outstanding student receiving high honours in almost all of her courses. However, when she entered the United States, Crystal was required to repeat the fifth grade because she did not meet certain academic standards mandated by the Massachusetts public school system.

My mother put us through prep school in Jamaica. It was a private school and I went to a private high school, too. I went to the second best high school in Jamaica. It was the only girls' Catholic school. Then I came here because of my parents' divorce. Because of financial problems, we had to attend a public school when we moved to Massachusetts, which was a big difference. We didn't do quite as well, especially in subjects like history because I never studied American history before. I didn't know the foundation of American history. But my mother still expected a lot from us. Whenever I brought home a B she was like "What is this? I know you can do better." She was probably right 'cause I really didn't study. If I can get an A or a B without studying, I'm sure if I studied, I could have done a lot better. That's just not me, though. If I didn't do a paper the night before or two weeks before it was due I'm sure I could get a better grade. But if I can get a good grade doing it last minute, I'll do it that way.

My mother gets really upset with us when we do things last minute 'cause she knows us, and she knows we're not doing our best. She doesn't monitor my grades or anything like that anymore. She hasn't since I graduated from high school. But she'll say, "Oh, I know you could have done that or you could do better." She's always encouraging, especially when she says things like "I want you to graduate from college, you've got to do that." But she expects perfection from all of her children.

My mother is always talking about how we have this great opportunity for educational success in America. When she was younger, she was one of nine children and she had to stop school because of her older sisters. Her

parents had to pay for school, both public and private, because you have to pay for education in Jamaica. My mother grew up very poor which is another reason why she stresses education. She strongly believes that education is how you get yourself out of poverty. She struggled and had to drop out of school. But after we were born, she eventually finished high school. So it was very difficult for her to get her high school degree and she expects us to work just as hard.

By the time she entered high school, Crystal stood close to six feet tall.

Although she presented an imposing and sometimes intimidating presence among her peers, Crystal describes herself as a “bold, curious, and sometimes, weird-looking individual.” Crystal’s high school friends, however, described her as “a beautiful young lady with a charming and humorous personality.”

In a recommendation supporting her admission to UMass Dartmouth, Crystal’s high school English teacher characterised her as one who “loves to laugh and often infects others with her high spirits. She is gifted in the areas of creative writing, poetry recitation, and interpretation of literature.” Equally impressive is Crystal’s “lucid problem solving ability and penetrating intelligence” which some believe will greatly enhance her chances of achieving success.

After graduating from high school, Crystal was accepted at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and several other institutions within the Massachusetts state college system. However, she was convinced by her guidance counsellor to attend Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) where she would receive academic support in critical reading and writing. STCC was also suggested because it was felt that the community college environment could assist Crystal in developing the necessary academic and social skills to continue her transition into American culture.



After attending Springfield Technical Community College for two years, Crystal transferred to UMass Dartmouth where she was accepted into College Now, an alternative admissions program for educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Unfortunately, none of her credits from STCC were even considered in the transfer admissions process. According to Crystal,

I never had an official transcript sent to UMass Dartmouth because of a dispute over an unpaid tuition bill at Springfield Technical Community College. They said that I owed \$1,800. But according to my records I only owed them \$200. And I wasn't going to pay a bill I knew was wrong. So I didn't pay the bill and they refused to send my official transcript to UMass Dartmouth. I transferred knowing it would take me at least three more years to earn a college degree there.

After graduating from UMass Dartmouth, Crystal hopes to enter law school and realize her lifelong dream to become a criminal lawyer.

Ever since I can remember, I have been fascinated with law. At first it was a mere childhood fantasy to become a lawyer like Perry Mason. As a child, I would read mystery books and I always found out who the criminal was by the middle of the book. I later learned what a difference lawyers could make, helping people and putting away the criminals. That is what I would like to do. I would also like to help abused kids. I would like to help battered wives and girlfriends to leave their abusers. I would help them to get on with their lives, and I don't believe that a case is over when the trail ends. For me, the case isn't over until my clients have their lives back on track. My case would not be over until my clients have gained back some of the dignity they have lost.

At the end of the spring semester, Crystal was well on her way to achieving her dreams. She earned a 2.7 grade point average as an English major with a minor in criminal justice. She also earned special recognition as the managing editor of The Black College Journal, a magazine for students of color.

Wayne. Wayne grew up in Camden, New Jersey, where he began his secondary school education in one of the worst school districts in the city. However, as a talented



student athlete, Wayne was fortunate enough to receive an academic scholarship to complete his junior and senior years at a private preparatory school in Pennsylvania.

According to Wayne,

I grew up in the Camden area most of my life. I grew up in an all black neighbourhood that was really depressed. Fortunately, I received a scholarship to a private high school in Pennsylvania in my junior year. It was a boarding school with mostly white students, but there were a few minorities on campus. Being there was a whole different experience for me. Although I survived quite well, being one of a few black students in that high school was a very difficult experience.

After graduating from West Town High School, Wayne entered Millersville University of Pennsylvania on a partial academic scholarship and a partial athletic scholarship to play basketball. Wayne was a star player on the university's basketball team. Standing 6'7" tall, Wayne's outstanding performance on the basketball court earned him national recognition, conference honors, and a record that would eventually assure him a place in the university's Hall of Fame.

After three years of pursuing a degree in physics at Millersville, Wayne realized that he lacked the aptitude and the academic foundation to continue with that major. He was eventually placed on academic probation and forced to relinquish both his scholarships because of poor academic performance. According to Wayne,

I was one of the star players. I was really into campus life, going to parties and all that. I was too involved in clowning around and just hanging out with my friends. Going to classes just wasn't that important. I could have been a good student academically. But I realize now that I didn't have the background to be a physics major. I was rather weak in math and science but physics is what I wanted to study. It was something I had in my heart and I wanted to try it anyway. I wasn't doing well in my classes 'cause it wasn't a top priority for me. Even though I wanted to make it a priority, I just got caught up in having fun. And yes, I had dreams of playing professional basketball, 'cause I was really good. But after my grades went down and I lost my scholarships. I realized that I was only wasting my time and money. I had to take out loans to pay for

an education that was going nowhere. I needed to get more serious about my education.

I always felt that I should have attended a predominantly black college. I feel that I could have gotten more help academically, 'cause the teachers there probably would have cared more about my education. But I can't put the blame on anybody. I had the ball in my court. Most of my friends who have gone to a predominantly black college have done very well, academically and socially. They really had a positive experience. I was sort of envious of their experience cause I truly believe that I didn't get the same kind of experience at Millersville. Although it wasn't a totally bad experience, I think it could have been better.

Discouraged by his academic performance and the loss of his scholarships, Wayne considered foregoing college completely. Instead, he spent the next two years working 50 to 60 hours a week while enrolled as a part-time student in Millersville's Division of Continuing Studies. However, because of his love for the game, basketball continued to play an important role in Wayne's life and he played on various AAU basketball teams in eastern Pennsylvania.

At one point, Millersville University "offered [Wayne] the chance to come back and finish [his] degree." But he told them, "I'm sorry. I have a job." Gradually, Wayne grew tired of living in Pennsylvania and wanted to transfer to another college, in another state, where he could start life over without basketball. Wayne felt that he could change his life by relocating to an area where he could focus on achieving his educational goals. He admits "at Millersville, I wasn't too successful, but you live and learn. I had to move on from there and get on with my life."

Fortunately, the opportunity to relocate came when Wayne's employer, Town Eco Systems, offered him a managerial position in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The move to Massachusetts would provide Wayne the opportunity to continue his college education, away from basketball, away from an environment where he had experienced



academic failure, and away from long-time college friends who were still interested only in “clowning around and hanging out at parties.”

I always knew that I had the ability to shine brightly. And I feel that I had not come even close to reaching my real academic potential. I’m too strong to let my shortcomings defeat my dreams and goals of becoming a successful businessman. So I was determined to finish college, to get a college degree.

Wayne decided to make the long drive to Massachusetts and transfer his college credits to a four-year institution similar to Millersville University. But Wayne first had to prove to himself, to his family, and to others that he could compete academically at the collegiate level. So while working full-time at his new managerial position with Town Eco Systems, Wayne enrolled at Bristol Community College (BCC), a Massachusetts public community college. He wanted to re-focus his academic career and to regain confidence in his ability to achieve educational success. In fact, Wayne saw the community college as his last opportunity to redirect his failing collegiate career.

After two semesters at BCC, Wayne transferred into the business administration program at UMass Dartmouth. One of the factors influencing his decision to transfer was the belief that UMass Dartmouth could help him achieve academic and career success. According to Wayne, “After I moved here, I realized that the university had a strong academic support system and a goal-oriented campus environment, and that was all I needed to know.”

Although he has given up basketball, Wayne is often perceived as a basketball player at UMass Dartmouth. Still standing head and shoulders above most of his peers,



Wayne is constantly pursued by the athletic director and the men's head basketball coach because he has one semester remaining of eligibility for collegiate basketball.

I was asked to play basketball. I get that all the time. People always ask me, "Oh you should play basketball!" But, I tell them that I can't 'cause I work and support myself, and I'm trying to finish college. I am intelligent and mature. And I want people to see who I truly am. I don't want to repeat the same mistakes I made when I was at Millersville University. There I had a real disappointing experience, and my parents were disappointed in me too. But, to turn things around at BCC and to come here, I now have a second opportunity to finish my degree. I can't just clown around. I can be a good student if I apply myself. And if I do, it'll be easy for me to get good grades and to graduate.

During his first semester at UMass Dartmouth, Wayne held true to his promise and shunned extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, because of his job's demanding responsibilities, Wayne earned only a 1.70 cumulative grade point average as an accounting major during his first semester. By the end of the spring semester, Wayne had earned a 2.7 GPA and is expected to graduate on schedule. He continues to work full-time and remains confident, hard-working, and determined to accomplish his educational and career goals. Wayne says,

My plan is to graduate and to find a job. I'm not really concerned about the pay, I'm concerned about the experience. I don't have much of it and, without experience, it's difficult to have leverage in the work force. So my main concern is to get a job where I can gain a lot of experience. Hopefully, I'll go to graduate school.

My experiences at Millersville and here at UMass have made me a stronger person. I've learned to become really independent. I've met a lot of people. Yet being a black male, I have to depend on myself. When I get out into the work force, I don't think it's going to be much different. I have to learn how to get things done despite the environment I'm in. So far, I've learned a lot and I've done well. I want to give back to the black community. But right now, my first concern is to get a good job. Once I'm set, I'd love to be a mentor to young kids. I would really love to do that. I would like to encourage students of color to keep their heads up. They have to realize that in college there are some professors who are more than willing to help you get a good education.

Early on in his college career, Wayne received a great deal of support from both of his parents. Now, however, much of the encouragement, psychological support, and financial assistance he receives comes from his fiancée.

My parents have always supported me, especially my mother. But my parents sometimes don't really understand how difficult it's been for me to finish college. They're just waiting for me to graduate. And I'm proud to tell them it's going to happen soon. However, the individual who has encouraged me the most to get my degree has been my girlfriend. We live in Providence 'cause she's attending URI. We wanted to live somewhere between URI and UMass Dartmouth.

Robert. A long-time resident of Massachusetts, Robert grew up in a section of Roxbury where racial stereotypes, black-on-black crime, street violence, and social segregation are constant and pervasive issues confronting the African-American community. Yet, Robert is the first in his family to attend college and is encouraged by his mother to remain in college despite the social conditions that characterize his neighborhood.

I feel like [my parents] expected me to attend college. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. And they expect me to graduate, too. I guess it's because they've seen how far I've come in the past two years, and from that they realize what I can achieve. So I think they will see me graduate. I know I have their support. And, some way, somehow, I am determined to go on to medical school.

Although Robert now values education and expects to eventually attend medical school, that wasn't always the case. In fact, a difficult high school experience forced him to terminate his education in the 11th grade. Yet after a two-year absence, he managed to earn a GED.

At the time of the interview, Robert was not specific about the circumstance that forced him to drop out of high school. He would only say that "the road on which I was aimlessly wandering resulted in chaos and a near death experience." As a result,



Robert said it was necessary “to develop a five-year plan that gave me a newfound philosophy of life, and motivated me to use and appreciate time like the precious commodity it is.”

Robert’s five-year plan led him to Roxbury Community College because he realized that “in America, it is highly unlikely that someone without a college or graduate school education was going to obtain a decent job making over \$25,000 a year.” As an individual who “wanted to be comfortable and to provide for [his] children, [his] mother, and for the people [he] cares about the most,” Robert was determined to get a college degree.

After one year at Roxbury Community College, Robert became very dissatisfied with the quality of college life there. He was particularly dissatisfied with the academic support programs, feeling “they never taught me how to use a computer, to surf the web, or to really sit down and study.”

As a commuter student, Robert was also dissatisfied with the social life at Roxbury Community College. He longed for the opportunity to attend a four-year institution where he could live on campus, participate in clubs and organizations, and become part of a real college community.

At Roxbury, I wasn’t really satisfied with the quality of education and the college environment. Although I didn’t have any knowledge of what college was supposed to be like, I knew that Roxbury wasn’t a four-year college. And I knew that it wasn’t the traditional college environment with dorms and things like that. It really wasn’t the kind of college environment where students could have town hall-like meetings. Nor were there a lot of student clubs and organizations on campus. Things like that I missed out on. I wanted to have those kinds of experiences. So I decided to transfer to a four-year institution and live on campus where I could be part of a real college community.



After visiting several colleges in Massachusetts and talking with friends at various four-year institutions, Robert decided to transfer to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. One of the factors influencing his decision was the opportunity to live on campus and to leave Boston, his home for almost 21 years.

Another factor influencing Robert's choice of UMass Dartmouth was the fact that he could major in chemistry. Although he did not have a solid background in the sciences, Robert wanted to attend medical school. Yet he was often criticized by his academic advisor at Roxbury for being "extremely zealous in his pursuit of what some considered to be an unrealistic goal." Despite the criticism, Robert had an "unrelenting determination and commitment to achieve his educational dreams."

After transferring to UMass Dartmouth, Robert realized that he was the only African-American male pursuing a degree in chemistry, and that the road to medical school would be difficult. Yet, despite the odds and under a great deal of pressure, Robert was determined to graduate with a degree in chemistry and continue on to medical school. After two semesters at the university, Robert has earned a 2.66 cumulative grade point average as a chemistry major.

It's my goal to be comfortable in life as long as I stay in America. So that's just common sense. I want to be comfortable and to provide for my children. I want to plan ahead early for my children's sake and for my mother and for the people I care about. I want to be able to provide for them, and definitely for myself. That's what makes me stay in college.

Wanda. Wanda began elementary school in Jamaica, where she was born and lived until the age of eight. Although she was an excellent student in Jamaica, the Springfield, Massachusetts public school system demoted her a grade when she and her family moved to that city. According to Wanda, "The school system made me repeat

the fourth grade because they told me that people could not understand what I was saying. They told me I had to get speech therapy.”

So Wanda spent five years in speech therapy, “trying to get rid of what some referred to as a West Indian accent.” Unfortunately, after successfully completing a program in speech therapy, Wanda was discouraged by the constant criticism from family members and friends who told her “Oh, you speak like a white girl.”

By the time she reached high school, Wanda was an honor student and an outstanding athlete in both basketball and track. She knew she wanted to attend college. She recalls,

I always knew what I was going to do. I always knew that I was going to a Division I college because I was a track star. I knew it because I went to the Junior Olympics where I was approached by a number of college recruiters. And I did everything necessary to prepare me to compete at the college level.

Unfortunately, Wanda’s dreams of a Division I scholarship were shattered in her senior year because of academic deficiencies in math.

In my senior year of high school, my counsellor went to one of the local colleges to complete an internship. It was then that I discovered that I was missing a college prep math course. That course eventually prevented me from getting into Spellman, the college I had always wanted to attend. I was never strong in math. In fact, I hated math. But no one ever told me that I needed two advanced level math courses in order to get into a four-year college. I had honors courses in almost everything else except math.

After being rejected for admission to Spellman College, Wanda applied to several Ivy League colleges in the Northeast. However, the rejection letters continued to arrive, each one referring to a deficient math background as the reason why she had been denied admission. According to Wanda, “those math courses changed my whole



life. So I decided to apply to UMass Amherst and to UMass Dartmouth, both schools where I had no interest in running track.”

Although she was in need of financial assistance to attend college, Wanda never applied for financial aid. She wasn't concerned with the cost of education at a public institution because of the low tuition rate and the fact that her paternal father had promised to pay for her entire college education. Yet Wanda would later learn that she could not depend on her father for financial assistance.

Although my natural parents are divorced, my paternal father had always told me that no matter what college I attended he would pay for my education. My natural father made an agreement with me and my sister that he was going to pay for our education no matter what college we decided to attend. But, when I finally realized that my dad was not going to pay for my college education, it was almost September, and I didn't have the money and I didn't have the time to wait for him to change his mind. My mother surely didn't have the money either. So I decided to attend Springfield Technical Community College (STCC). I knew my mother could not afford to send me anywhere else. But I figured that I'd only be there for a year or so. I would go there and then transfer to a four-year college.

At Springfield Tech., Wanda majored in Liberal Studies. In her first semester, Wanda became disillusioned with her choice. She recalls

I really wanted to live in a dorm. I didn't want to go home every day and listen to my mother complain about who I was going out with, what time I was coming home, or even to ask me to go to the grocery store. And I really didn't want to take care of my little brother. So eventually, I moved out and got my own apartment.

Although Wanda felt that Springfield Technical Community College was academically challenging, she knew that something was missing from her collegiate experience. Yet, she remained at STCC for two years. By her fourth semester on campus, things begin fall apart. According to Wanda,



At that point in my college career, I basically didn't do anything. My grades went down because I was not motivated. I did not want to be at a community college anymore. I was miserable. I was getting in a rut. I just knew that it was time for me to move on.

Wanda eventually transferred to UMass Dartmouth, where she is now pursuing a major in psychology and minor in African American Studies. Making the dean's list in her first semester at UMass Dartmouth, Wanda is indeed living her dreams, clearly demonstrating that she has the ability to succeed at the collegiate level.

### The 12 Other Participants

Mildred. Mildred graduated from the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) with an associate degree in Electrical Engineering Technology. It took Mildred almost five years to complete her degree because of difficulties she experienced as a single parent raising a son and caring for a sick, elderly mother.

Despite these and other personal problems, Mildred was determined to graduate from college and to become an engineer. Yet her aspirations to obtain a college degree in engineering almost became a diverted dream because one of her professors tried to force her out of the engineering technology program at CCRI. According to Mildred, "he just didn't feel I was capable of completing a degree in engineering. Fortunately, I proved him wrong and completed my degree like I said I would."

After graduating from CCRI, Mildred was accepted for admission at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. However, an acute medical problem almost prevented her from enrolling at the university. She recalls,

During the physical examination I took to complete the admissions process, the doctor discovered that there was a problem with my bone marrow. He suggested that I would need a bone marrow transplant. I was

really devastated. Here it was June and I was supposed to start school in September. The doctor suggested that I give up school, and I said, “Jesus, I just fought so hard to get into that school, now you want me to give it up?” Anyway, I stayed. And from that point on, I cried almost every day ‘cause I didn’t know what was going to happen to me or to my son. But I said even if I die tomorrow, I’ll never quit school. So I stayed. I kept going to the doctor every six months to be checked. Eventually, the doctors didn’t find anything wrong with me. I don’t know why. Physically, everything went back to normal. I think that maybe it was a miracle. But I stayed in school.

Academically, Mildred is doing extremely well at UMass Dartmouth, earning a 2.8 GPA as an electrical engineering major during fall the semester. However, despite her academic success, Mildred sincerely believes that her illness will reoccur before she completes her degree. At that point, she will have to choose between seeking medical treatment or terminating her education. In the meantime, Mildred plans to take each day one by one.

Almost every day before I leave campus, I cry. I look around and I say good-byes to all my friends ‘cause maybe I won’t be coming back to school. Although I enjoy coming to school, I need to straighten out my life. I have been poor for so long. I am sick and tired of being poor and counting pennies to pay for day care or to buy shoes for my son. So I hope to God that I can finish my degree. I just hope that my medical condition does not reoccur sooner than expected.

Elizabeth. Growing up in the Greater New Bedford area, Elizabeth recalls various childhood experiences that influenced her personal development.

I am from a predominantly white area in Acushnet, Massachusetts. I think there are still only about five families of color living in my neighbourhood. My family has lived in Acushnet for over 21 years and I am 23. I think my parents have done an excellent job helping us to become the individuals we are. Because of them, I love to have fun. I love art. I’m helpful. I’m more compassionate. I’m very thoughtful, very thoughtful and I think that I am growing as a person, both racially and culturally.



After graduating from New Bedford High School, Elizabeth says she wanted to attend UMass Dartmouth. Instead, she decided to move to Boston to find full-time employment.

I really felt that I should have attended the university after graduating from high school. UMass Dartmouth had everything I was looking for in a college. At that time, it had a great business program. And it had a tuition rate that was reasonably low compared to other universities. But, at that time in my life, I also felt I had to get away from the area, to look for a good job, and to find myself.

While waiting to land what she hoped would be that “perfect job,” Elizabeth enrolled at Bay State College, a private two-year institution in Boston, where she majored in business administration. After spending only one academic year there, Elizabeth became bored with business administration and dissatisfied with both the academic and social life at Bay State College. So she decided to transfer, to move back in with her parents in Acushnet, Massachusetts, and to attend UMass Dartmouth.

I chose Bay State College because I wanted to move away from home. And I can honestly say that I enjoyed living in Boston. But I was very disappointed with Bay State College, especially the curriculum. I felt as if I was still in high school. I also felt that as a business major, the school was not providing me with what was needed to succeed in the business world.

When I transferred into this school from Bay State College, I was a business major ‘cause my parents pushed me into that program. But I was very bored with business and I was so frustrated ‘cause I knew it wasn’t me. Although I loved living in Boston, I didn’t care for the Bay State College. There wasn’t a lot for me to do on the campus. I was living in Boston and taking classes. I didn’t work a lot. So I came home to live with my parents. Their home was only 15-20 minutes away from UMass Dartmouth. So I thought it would be convenient for me to attend the university. I graduated from New Bedford High School, and I was very familiar with the campus and many of the students already at the university.



Since enrolling at UMass Dartmouth, Elizabeth has changed her major to art education, a decision that proved difficult because of the pressure from her parents, especially her father, to remain a business major. Apparently, Elizabeth's father wanted her to pursue a major that was practical and would provide needed skills so she could secure a good job after graduation.

When I decided to change majors, my mother was very supportive. Like me, she's very artistic, and I have an older sister who's an architect. She's always been very supportive too. You know, mom has always kept copies of all our art work. But Dad, he is more concerned with money. He would ask, "what kind of money are you going to make? Are you going to make enough money?" I think that was his greatest concern. But when I told him about my plans, he tried to be as supportive as he could. But I could tell that he was very disappointed. I reassured him that if he really is concerned about my happiness, he'd understand that majoring in art is what makes me happy. That's what I enjoy and that's what I do well in. Now he's totally supportive. I'm a sculpture major and I recently gave him some jewellery that I made in class. Now, he's behind me 100%. But, like I said, at first it was difficult for him to understand my decision.

Elizabeth's long-term goal is to have her own day care center. She feels that, by taking accounting and management courses, she'll be able to manage her own business.

I'm not the ideal A student and school has always been a struggle for me, but I find that the more I study, the better person I become. I may struggle and have tough times but the return is paying off. And I think that is what counts more. No matter how big a leap it is to get there, I'm going to get there. School is my number one priority. Continuing my education and eventually finishing my degree is important to me.

Someday, I really want to work as an art teacher, and one of my own long-term goals is to have my own day care. That is why I want business behind me, especially courses in accounting and so forth, so that I can manage my own business. But I want to do art on the side. I love the teacher's schedule, you know, home by 3 and summers off. So, hopefully, I can do my artwork then. I have a studio at home in the basement now. It's very small, but that's where I go to relax. I'm in my own little world down there, and I enjoy it. I just have to keep me in mind 'cause I am number one. Teaching art will definitely be part of my life.

Reflecting on the reasons why she decided to attend UMass Dartmouth, Elizabeth says,

I needed to make the best decision for myself and I believed that UMass Dartmouth would definitely give me the education that I deserved. I enjoy it here, even though it is a predominantly white university. A number of my friends have gone to a black university, and they've really enjoyed it. But because it was a historically black university, they didn't have a lot of things that we have here at UMass, like email, state-of the art computers, and things like that. Although there are not a lot of black students here, I don't regret my decision coming to UMass Dartmouth. But I would have liked to go farther away from home.

Raymond. Although he currently resides in Taunton, Raymond is originally from Trinidad and has been living in the United States for almost 15 years. In Trinidad, Raymond was employed as a nursing assistant. He hopes to return to his native country, and eventually build a retirement home for his family.

My whole family is still in Trinidad - my parents, my brothers, my sisters. Someday, I want to have a home there so I can enjoy the rest of my life with my family. But for now, I try to remain focused on getting my degree in nursing so that I can become a registered nurse. I know what I want and I am at the age where I am not in school to fool around or to look cute. Back in Trinidad, I understood full well the importance of an education. And that's why I'm here, to get an education. I have been here for almost 15 years. And let me tell you, if you come from a poor country like Trinidad, America is the best place to be. You want to come here and get the best education possible.

Raymond transferred to UMass Dartmouth from Cape Cod Community College where he earned an associate degree in nursing. At the time of our interview, he is the only African-American male at the university enrolled as a degree candidate in the College of Nursing.

In Trinidad, I was a nursing assistant. But when I came to America, I had to start all over again because the school system would not recognize my qualifications from Trinidad. I had to get my GED and start from there. Basically, I just went and I took the test so I could qualify for the nursing program at Cape Cod Community College. I guess it is something that



every immigrant has to face. I quickly realized that, when you come from another country, you have to start over regardless of what educational achievements you attained in your own country. You sometimes have to start at the bottom and go from there.

I went to Cape Cod Community College because I had a friend who lived on the Cape. She told me she was going to go to Cape Cod. In nursing school you need somebody talk to. So I thought that, since she is going to Cape Cod, I would just go down there. I got accepted. So I enrolled. While at Cape Cod I was in the nursing program (LPN). It was the fast track nursing program. Because I had previously taken college level courses in Trinidad, it only took me about a year and a half to complete the nursing program at Cape Cod Community College. I then transferred into the nursing program here at UMass Dartmouth.

Had I stayed in Trinidad, a career in nursing would have been the farthest occupation from my mind. Before I came to the United States, I was thinking about a career in engineering, electrical engineering. But when I looked at an employment guide on careers held by minorities, I was determined to get a job where, if I relocated to another state, I would not have to start my career all over again.

I have a close friends who had good job here in Massachusetts. But when he moved to Orlando, Florida, he had to find employment in an entirely different career field. I mean, he had to start all over again. I didn't want to make that same mistake. So that's why I decided to major in nursing. But as I said, nursing wasn't like my first love. It was just that I have a family and I know that, if I move somewhere else in the country, I want to be able to maintain a certain standard of living in the career field I want.

Because of family obligations and various employment responsibilities, it is difficult for Raymond to become involved in campus social activities or to interact socially with his classmates. Yet he truly enjoys the challenge of being in a four-year college environment. Currently, Raymond has a 3.2 cumulative grade point average and hopes to finish his degree in nursing on schedule, and eventually earn a master's degree.



Della. Della was born in Columbus, Ohio. Prior to enrolling at UMass Dartmouth, she lived in Washington, D. C., and Dallas, Texas.

My two sisters and I were raised in Dallas, Texas. One of them is currently in college. The other one graduated last year. My mother is originally from Pittsburgh and my father is from Tennessee. Although he attended college in Tennessee, my father eventually moved to Dallas seeking employment. So that's what moved us from Ohio to Texas. I remember Columbus as being this clean, nice, beautiful place to live. I loved it.

After graduating from high school, Della decided to attend Prince Georges Community College in Dallas. She later transferred to Richland Community College, also in Dallas, because it was closer to home. However, to achieve her career objectives, Della knew she had to transfer to a four-year college away from the high school mentality she perceived in the community college environment. She recalls,

I hated attending a community college. It was like high school all over again because everyone I knew went there. In fact, Richland was the place to go if you weren't going away to college. It was like I never graduated from high school at all. I did two years of college at Richland. I then took three years off. After that, I decided to come back to college because I believed that it was the right time for me. So I applied here to UMass Dartmouth. I also applied to the University of Missouri, to Drexel in Philadelphia, and to a very, very, very small school called Christopher Newport in Newport News, Virginia. I also applied to Howard University. But I didn't get accepted there. So I decided to attend UMass Dartmouth. When I was at Richland Community College, I wanted to be a child therapist. I wanted to do art therapy, play therapy. I took some developmental psychology courses there with this professor. But anyway, it was because of him that I decided to become an art therapist.

When she arrived at UMass Dartmouth last summer, Della, who had just turned 23, was very uncertain about her decision to move to New England. She also felt somewhat reluctant to live in a dormitory with what she referred to as "a bunch of 18- and 19-year-old college students." So Della made an agreement with her parents that she would enroll at UMass Dartmouth with the understanding that she would transfer

back to Dallas if things don't work out. According to Della, "if all else fails, I know my family will be there for me."

So far, Della is adjusting quite well to the academic demands of the university. However, she has given up on the idea of becoming a child therapist. Instead, she is majoring in economics and currently holds a 2.77 cumulative grade point average.

Brittany. Since junior high school, Brittany has wanted to go away to college. Although she received a great deal of support and encouragement from her mother to attend the college of her choice, it was Brittany's older sister who motivated her to remain committed to and focused on her educational and career goals.

I just wanted to move out of my parents' house. I did. I wanted to go to college, but I didn't know exactly where I wanted to go. I did know from being around my parents' friends and my older sister's friends that my chances of experiencing success would be better if I attended a university. My parents have always taught me to learn from the mistakes of others instead of making my own mistakes. So that's what I really tried to do.

My older sister has always been a positive influence and a phenomenal role model in my life. I use the word phenomenal to describe her because no other word seemed to do her justice. While she was just a little girl, she took it upon herself to come home from school and teach me certain facts of life. She helped me to excel in my primary years of school. It was she who taught me how to prioritize and set goals for myself, goals that can provide me with something to strive for, goals that could give me a push when I needed it the most.

I also have a number of friends who support me too, but they have their own agenda now, and I can respect that. I'm an adult now. I know there's not always going to be someone there to hold my hand. So I look at it as me getting out into the real world and being more independent and doing more things for myself.

After graduating from Boston Academy, Brittany moved to Providence where she enrolled at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). Her decision to attend CCRI was not influenced by any deficiencies in her academic development. In fact, she



had the grades, the SAT scores, and even the high school recommendations to gain admission into some of the best colleges in the area. Instead, Brittany enrolled at CCRI because she failed to establish priorities in her life.

I chose CCRI because, in my senior year of high school, I was being so lazy with the college application process. I was focused on so many other things. I had a boyfriend and he was my life, my love. CCRI was the first school that accepted me. My boyfriend didn't want me to go too far away. So it was like, move to Rhode Island, okay, I can do this. But I just wasn't thinking. So you know, that's why I ended up there. Even when I first got there, it seemed good, you know, no Friday classes. I could party from Thursday to Sunday night. But once November rolls around, that really gets old really fast. I'm paying all this money to come here and I'm getting nothing out of it. I knew a lot of the black students there. Well all of them except for one girl that I knew were on academic probation. It was like no one was focused on getting an education. Instead, people were in college just to say they were in college. No one was doing the work and it wasn't even challenging. That's another reason why I left.

After refocusing her educational and career goals, Brittany decided to transfer.

She says,

I actually came to the point where I looked through all of the majors that the school was offering and there was nothing even remotely like what I wanted to do. I wanted a career in marriage therapy. I knew I had to take courses in psychology. So I decided to transfer to a four-year college. I decided to transfer to UMass Dartmouth and major in psychology.

The work here is a lot more challenging. But that's something I wanted. I wasn't learning much at CCRI. Most of the stuff they were teaching I already knew from high school. I was studying the night before an exam and making straight A's. It shouldn't have been that easy. Here at UMass Dartmouth, the work is not too hard. But I have to discipline myself, set realistic goals, and come up with a study schedule that I can stick to.

Henrietta. Henrietta came to the United States in 1987 from Ethiopia. Coming to America was not only frightening for Henrietta, it was also an experience in culture shock. Reflecting on her transition into American culture, Henrietta recalls,

It was an entirely new experience. I met a lot of new people and everyone assured me that I would be okay once I settled into American culture. But



I think anyone who is from a different country would experience a sense of culture shock when they first come here because the language is different and the people are different too. It's like a different world. I went through a lot of psychological changes that I never would have experienced had I stayed in Ethiopia.

After attending both elementary and high schools in the Worcester, Henrietta enrolled at Quinsigamond Community College.

When I first came to the United States, I attended grade school and then high school. I started taking classes part-time at Quinsigamond Community College while in high school because it was close to my house, and my father worked there during my freshman year. So by the time I was a sophomore, I had earned enough credits to go on to college without having to finish high school. In college, I majored in liberal studies.

My father was constantly encouraging me to attend college full-time and not to waste my time trying to finish high school. He felt I was ready to attend college somewhere. But he wasn't ready to let me go to college on the West Coast or somewhere far away. It was easier for him to allow me to complete the first two years at a college close to home.

Socially, I think being at a community college gave me a chance to associate with people who were much older. High school was an entirely different environment. Sure, there were students in high school who were my age. But at the end of the day, I went on to Quinsigamond to take night classes. So I think being at a community college at such a young age gave me the opportunity to learn and to mature.

While at Quinsigamond Community College, Henrietta was "the beneficiary of a state-funded dual enrollment program which allowed [her] to complete high school and college credits at the same time." By enrolling in this program, Henrietta was assured that all of the credits she earned would transfer to a four-year college or university within the Massachusetts system of higher education.

After graduating from Quinsigamond Community College, my father and I sat down and discussed my academic strengths and weaknesses. We determined that I was very good in English. I decided to major in English at the college level. I also decided to attend UMass Dartmouth because it offered a major in English and my father had an adult friend who was

employed as an administrator here. My father felt that his friends could watch over me and assist me in adjusting to the university.

As an English major, Henrietta is doing very well academically. She is making plans to attend law school after graduation from UMass Dartmouth.

Hopefully, I have one more semester, and then I'll graduate in December. Once I graduate, I hope I'll be academically prepared to go to law school. That's basically my goal after UMass Dartmouth. So right now, I'm just trying to get prepared for graduate school. That's my plan. In the meantime, I try to be actively involved in helping culturally diverse students adjust to the University.

Sherron. Sherron grew up in a single family home in the Greater Boston area. The younger of two children, Sherron received a great deal of support and encouragement from her mother, whom she characterizes as a strong, intelligent, and powerful woman and a positive black role model.

I live with my mom. My mom basically raised my brother and me. I know who my father is and he gives my mother money for our support. But, as far as emotional support is concerned, I've always depended on my mother, well, my mother and sometimes my father actually. But my mother supports me 220%. She's always there, supporting me in whatever I want to do.

Unfortunately, the support and encouragement of her mother was not enough to keep Sherron out of trouble as a high school student. In fact, Sherron was expelled from three different high schools before completing her secondary education in the Boston public school system. After graduating, she enrolled at the University of Maryland at Baltimore because she wanted to be independent and to live as far away from home as possible. More importantly, Sherron wanted the personal, social, and academic experiences often associated with a predominantly black college.



Unfortunately, after only six months on the Baltimore campus, Sherron realized that her decision to attend a predominantly black college was not such a good idea after all. She recalls,

The majority of my life was spent attending predominantly white schools. So I wanted the whole black experience in a college environment surrounded by nothing but other black students just like me. But when I got [to the University of Maryland], I realized that this wasn't what I expected. I assumed that being around a lot of black people was going to be one big happy family, but it wasn't. Instead, in my first semester on campus, there were students who came up to me, gritted their teeth, and wanted to fight me over some guy. I said to myself, "girl, you're paying thousands of dollars to attend this college to get an education, not to get into fights." So, at that point, I decided to transfer before I was kicked out for fighting or kicked out for bad grades. I was just too involved socially in the black experience.

When I think about my experiences at the University of Maryland, I guess if you want to be surrounded by black people that's fine. But that isn't what the real world is like. I think being in an all black environment or an all white environment shelters you from the real world.

At the end of her freshman year at the University of Maryland, Sherron decided to return home to Boston where she could focus on improving her academic performance by attending Roxbury Community College. However, after only a semester, Sherron applied for admission to the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth where her brother was a business major.

I hated to attend a community college, but I really had no choice. With the grades I got at the University of Maryland, what school was going to accept me? Fortunately, I really only needed one semester at Roxbury to turn things around. So I decided to transfer. I was familiar with UMass Dartmouth because my brother was already there. I always told myself, "I'm never going there 'cause my brother goes there." And I didn't want to be in school with my brother. But now, being here is different 'cause I'm closer to home and I have my brother here for protection. It's not like being in Baltimore where I was completely on my own and alienated from my family.



At the end of her first year at UMass Dartmouth, Sherron achieved a 2.7 cumulative grade point average as a political science major. If all goes well, she hopes to complete her baccalaureate degree and graduate with her brother at the end of the 2001 academic year. At some point, Sherron would like to attend law school.

I really never had to study in high school. But, I always did well. So, I guess I really never learned how to study. Now I'm still trying to learn how to study and do well. I'm doing a lot better this semester. It is hard. I guess that sounds silly but I don't want to flunk out of college. I want to get into law school and become a lawyer. But to be successful, I first have to develop better study habits. My grades last semester weren't too bad, but I can do better.

Ludovice. As the first in her family to attend college, Ludovice feels the pressure and the responsibility of being a role model for her younger brothers and sisters. Although she is sometimes confused, distracted, and in need of parental guidance, Ludovice is committed to finishing college and being successful.

At 23 years of age, I'm the oldest of 11 children. I'm the first and the only one in my family who's probably going to go to college. And yes, I feel there is a lot of pressure on me to finish college. My sister finished high school and has no plans to attend college. She has a baby and she is not going back to school. After graduating from high school, my brother was supposed to go to college but he got a job and has no desire to continue his education either. My little sister has already dropped out of high school. My father feels that I will be the only college graduate in the family. Sometimes the pressure from my father to finish college is too great. I know I am going to finish. I sometimes just can't enjoy myself because of all the pressure he puts on me. And it's difficult having to make all these decisions about my major, my career, and what courses to take, on my own.

Although Ludovice's parents are divorced, both of them played an important role in her initial educational development.

My father has never been able to support me financially. Maybe he doesn't want to because he hasn't. My mother will break her back to give us her last penny, you know. But my father, he has other things that are more important. When we were growing up in New York, my mother

would tell us to go down to Harlem to ask my father for money. When we got to his house, my father would tell us, "I don't have any money. Sorry, but I just don't have any." Now, why didn't he tell me that before we went all the way down to Harlem? My mother, if she didn't have any money, she would be honest and would tell us that she didn't have any. And I understood. Honesty, that's the difference between men and women. They are so different. My mother would try her best to give us her last \$8, you know what I mean. To this day, my father is still dishonest when it comes to revealing how much money he has. I know that sometime he does have it. He means well, and he'll try to give me whatever he can, but he's just not willing to pay for my education.

After graduating from high school in the Bronx, Ludovice spent two years at SUNY College Old Westbury. Unhappy with the quality of campus life there, Ludovice transferred to Clark Atlanta university, one of the historically black colleges. She wanted the experiences of attending college with other African-American students. According to Ludovice,

I guess I went down to Clark Atlanta 'cause everyone there was black. I guess I wanted to see what it would be like to attend a black university. I wanted that experience. I guess that's why I went down there. I really didn't want to finish school there. I guess I really didn't know what I wanted. But I know I wanted the experience of going to a black college. Being down there was a wonderful experience. But at the same time, the school was a little disorganized. Black students don't seem to be as organized as they should be. That's what I came to realize. In any case, I enjoyed the fact that there were black people everywhere. My roommate was from Oregon. I never thought I would meet someone from way, way across the country. But the campus was full of students from different parts of the United States and the world.

After only one semester in Atlanta, Ludovice felt that being away from her family and the close friends she had known since elementary school was too much of an adjustment. So she decided to return to Massachusetts where she could work part-time while attending college.

Knowing that her part-time job did not offer much in the way of career opportunity, Ludovice decided to continue her education at Cape Cod Community



College (CCCC) as a full-time student. However, she also knew that attending CCCC was not the answer to her dreams. She did not want an associate degree from a community college. Nor did she want a career that would keep her on the Cape. Instead, Ludovice wanted a bachelor's degree in psychology and the chance to return to Atlanta where she had a wonderful experience. After one year, Ludovice transferred to UMass Dartmouth. In reflecting on her decision to return to Massachusetts, Ludovice says,

I had a lot of fun in Atlanta. I really loved it down there. Clark Atlanta was a real party school and I partied almost everyday. Well, maybe a little bit too much 'cause I didn't do well academically. And I didn't have a family down there to help me through that experience. I come from a close family and that's really important to me. I felt that I needed to come back home. So, I moved to Massachusetts to live with my father, and I got a job on the Cape. I eventually ended up going to school on the Cape, you know. I still felt that I needed to be in school. So I started taking courses at Cape Cod Community College, but I knew that a degree from a community college wasn't going to get me anywhere because it was a two-year school. I had already earned 60 credits at my previous colleges. So, I needed to be back in a four-year college. My father told me about [UMass Dartmouth]. That's how I ended up here.

With a major in psychology and a minor in African-American Studies, Ludovice is determined to be successful. At the end of spring semester 2000, Ludovice earned a 2.8 cum average and plans to complete her degree by next year.

Lauren. In 1994, Lauren entered Bristol Community College (BCC) with the intent of pursuing an associate degree in English. However, two years later, at the age of 35, Lauren graduated with a degree in both art and math. Not satisfied with a two-year degree, Lauren transferred to UMass Dartmouth where she enrolled in the computer science program. According to Lauren,

Attending a four-year college and acquiring a bachelor's degree is more valuable today than it was 30 or even 20 years ago. That's why I want to



complete a baccalaureate degree. As a Dominican Sister, our mission is to respond to the service of the church, especially in the fields of health and education. Due to this delicate commitment, our professional education plays an important role or tool in answering the call of the church. That is why I think it is important that I prepare myself professionally. I must be able to respond in justice to our mission which is my reason for being here.

As a Dominican nun, Lauren does not have much time to get involved in the social life of the university or to develop close relationships with faculty or other students on campus. Although Lauren is very much interested in what happens on campus, her deep commitment to religion and the activities associated with her church take precedence over campus social life.

Basically, all I do is study. I am involved in community activities but not community activities within the university environment. Instead, I'm involved with the Dominican Sisters. I am involved with my community, the church. My time on campus is really limited and I don't really get involved in socializing with other students. After going to class, I spend some time in the library. But I usually leave campus early in the evening to meet with my Sisters at the convent. After that, I pray and then I study. That's all I really have time for.

As a student of color with a religious background, it was initially assumed that Lauren could offer a truly unique perspective on the social perception of student life at the university. Unfortunately, her limited involvement in campus activities did not provide much insight into the social experiences of African-American community college students in a predominantly white campus environment.

Yvette. As a junior at New Bedford High School, Yvette got pregnant and lost all interest in finishing school. She wanted only to marry the father of her child, to apply for welfare, and to survive on whatever financial support her parents would give. Fortunately, as a participant in Upward Bound, Yvette was encouraged by program

counsellors to delay marriage, to graduate from high school, and to attend Bristol Community College (BCC).

Lacking self-esteem, Yvette had serious doubts about her ability to pursue a college degree. She says, “because of my own personal life – low self-esteem, being a single parent, and not feeling smart enough even to finish high school - I had no idea that I would be accepted at BCC or at any college.”

At the request of her Upward Bound counsellors, Yvette applied for admission to Bristol Community College and was accepted as a business administration major. She attended BCC for only one academic year.

After enrolling at Bristol Community College, it became almost impossible for me to continue my education there. I didn't know from one week to the next how I was going to get to school. I was a single parent, and I had to depend on other people for rides to campus. It was really difficult for me to meet other students and to get involved in campus activities because I had a child. I did meet a number of other single parents. But we were all having a difficult time adjusting to college. So I couldn't depend on them. I really wanted to transfer to UMass Dartmouth 'cause it was closer to home.

Because she did not meet university admissions requirements, Yvette initially enrolled at UMass Dartmouth as a part-time student in the Division of Continuing Studies. According to Yvette, “I had to first prove that I could do the work, to study while being a single mom. It was hard at first. But I managed to get a grade point average high enough to get into a degree program.”

In fact, after successfully completing the special enrollment program for returning adult students, Yvette applied for admission to the university and was accepted as a degree candidate in the humanities and social sciences program for the 1999 fall semester. Currently, she holds a 2.77 cumulative grade point average. Yvette



credits her academic success at UMass Dartmouth to counsellors in the Division of Continuing Studies: “[The counsellors] were very supportive, not only in helping me to become a degree candidate, but also in helping me to realize the importance of a college education.”

Today, Yvette desperately wants to give back to her community by encouraging less fortunate students of color to pursue a college degree. She is motivated by the help and encouragement given by various faculty and staff throughout her college career.

When I finish my degree, I would like to be a counsellor or an advisor and help young students, especially minority students like me, who have experienced what I have gone through. I want to encourage them to believe in themselves and to take advantage of whatever opportunity that comes their way.

Jackie. Jackie attended Cape Cod Community College where she earned a certificate in early childhood education and an associate degree in liberal arts. It took Jackie four years to complete her associate’s degree because of a demanding, full-time job which allowed her to take only three courses a semester. According to Jackie,

I began at Cape Cod at the age of 25 after watching my sister complete her associate degree at 35. I always wanted to attend college but I never had the financial stability to achieve my dreams. But after seeing my older sister succeed, I knew I had to give it a shot.

The first in her family to attend a four-year college, Jackie believes that Project Advantage was a positive influence on her educational development at Cape Cod Community College. According to Jackie, “that academic support program for adult students provided me with the encouragement, self-esteem, and personal counseling I needed in order to believe that a college education was even possible.”



At 28, Jackie has been independent of her parents for a number of years.

However, to complete her education at Cape Cod Community College, Jackie moved in with friends and secured a student loan. She says,

without the loan, I would have never been able to make it past the first semester. But I quickly concluded that loans add up. So, I keep my grades up to at least a 3.0 so I can one day apply for a scholarship.

After graduating with high honors from Cape Cod Community College, Jackie enrolled at UMass Dartmouth for the 1999 fall semester. To finance her education, she applied for and received a full-tuition scholarship. The scholarship helped her to make an easy transition into the university community.

As a part-time teacher in a pre-school program, Jackie hopes that her experience will eventually lead to full-time employment in the teaching profession. She says, “After completing a degree in art education, I plan to go to Lesley College where I hope to receive a master’s in art education. I look forward to the day when I can use my education to help people.”

Ronald. After graduating from high school, Ronald enlisted in the armed forces. During his tour of duty, he spent two years in the Gulf War where he had plenty of time to reflect on his dreams of earning a college degree. According to Ronald:

I was in the Gulf War. God knows, I really didn’t want to die over there. So I just kept thinking of what life was going to be like when I returned to the States. I spent a lot of time thinking of nothing else but getting out of the service and going to college to finish my education. I always wanted to go to college. But I entered the Army first ‘cause that’s what my parents wanted me to do. If I had to do it over again, I would still serve my country, but I think I would have finished college first. I want a family and a good job. But before I can get either one, I have to get a college degree.

When he was discharged from the armed services, Ronald enrolled at Bristol Community College. Although he was characterized by his high school counselors as “an intelligent and creative individual who would likely succeed in college,” Ronald did not have the same level of confidence in his academic ability because his grades and test scores told a different story. Although he graduated from high school with a C average, now that he was back from the service, Ronald was determined to forget about his high school performance and concentrate on being successful at BCC.

After completing one academic year at Bristol Community College with a 3.1 cumulative grade point average, in a pre-engineering program, Ronald transferred to UMass Dartmouth. He initially entered the university as an electrical engineering major with the intent of following in the footsteps of his older brother, a successful engineer with a Boston firm. However, after doing exceptionally well in several math courses, Ronald changed his major to math.

With a major in math, Ronald hopes to become a teacher in the Wareham public school system where he completed his own secondary education. One factor that has influenced Ronald’s decision to major in math major was his desire to teach and mentor low-income and disadvantaged students in southeastern Massachusetts. He says,

I believe that logic, process, and computational skills associated with mathematics can be used to assist students in developing strategies for lifelong success. When I was in high school and elementary school, math was my strongest subject. But for many of my friends, math was a real challenge. Recently, I served as a substitute teacher in Wareham. It was then that I came to understand that many students of color continue to struggle with math. So I figured that, if I could become a math teacher, maybe I could do more to encourage disadvantaged students to be successful not only in math, but also in developing strategies to succeed in the game of life.



According to Ronald, one of the problems facing inner-city African-American school students is racism. Although Ronald has, himself, experienced racism on campus and in the military, he was reserved in describing such experiences within the campus environment. As a youth minister, Ronald characterizes racial discrimination “as only acts of ignorance.” He therefore tries to be a positive role model for all students, both blacks and whites. Ronald also has tried very hard not to allow his perceptions of or experiences with racism to distort his belief in “the innate goodness of man’s soul.”

#### Summary Analysis: Personal Characteristics and Background Experiences

Of the 16 students who participated in this study, 12 were females and 4 males. Yet in reviewing their background characteristics and experiences, it was evident that these students brought tremendous diversity to the university community with respect to previous college experiences, educational development, academic achievement, career aspirations, family support, and employment responsibilities. For example, while most of the participating students were born in Massachusetts, Wanda, Crystal, Henrietta, and Raymond emigrated to the United States from another country. Therefore, their educational development (both elementary and secondary) was slightly different from the educational development experienced by other participating students.

Additionally, three of the participants (Wayne, Ludovice, and Sherron) began their post-secondary education at a four-year college prior to transferring first to a community college and subsequently to UMass Dartmouth. The other students transferred to UMass Dartmouth directly from a community college. However, all of



the participants were confident that their academic skills and intellectual ability would enable them to persist to the baccalaureate degree.

In regard to family social structure, most of the participating students are children of parents who have relatively little college education. The majority of the students also came from single parent homes, where their parents were either separated or divorced. Unfortunately, for some students, their parents' marital status had a direct impact on their educational aspirations and their college choice. With respect to employment and family responsibilities, 11 of the participants were full-time students and depended on their parents for financial support. The others were independent and assume responsibility for supporting their own family, which in some cases include a spouse and children.

The theoretical expectations of Tinto's (1975) model suggest that students who are fully integrated into the academic and social communities of the college environment are more likely to persist to degree completion. However, consistent with the literature, the above analysis provides evidence that individual and family background characteristics, previous college experiences, and expectations about future educational attainment significantly influence not only students' integration into the academic and social life of the campus, but also their persistence and their commitment to degree completion.

#### Students' Racial Identity Development

In further discussing personal characteristics and background experiences that have influenced their involvement in campus social activities, students were asked to

talk about the importance of their racial identity in their social interactions. They were asked to tell stories as a way of eliciting details of background experiences that influenced their racial identity development, their perceptions of social integration, and their interpersonal interactions within the campus community.

In discussing her racial identity, Crystal indicated that growing up in Jamaica, she had always thought of herself only as Jamaican. While she has never believed in a color blind society, Crystal viewed racial identity as unimportant, wanting only to be appreciated as an individual. However, being biracial, Crystal was perceived differently by her peers once she moved to the United States. In fact, her light-skinned complexion caused some of her classmates to question her blackness, her identity, and her commitment to issues affecting people of color.

I have always thought of myself as Jamaican. But to be honest with you, I don't think anyone should be classified according to color. I don't think there should be color blindness either. I know this sounds weird. But I don't think there should be color blindness 'cause individuals should appreciate who they are. Growing up in Jamaica, I never thought of myself as black. I never thought of myself as white. My father is Italian and my mother is Jamaican. So, in reality, I guess I'm biracial. But growing up, I was always just Crystal and I was Jamaican.

However, when I came to the States, there were plenty of times when some of my friends either teased me about my color or questioned my blackness. And when I applied for admission to college, almost every application and every form I completed asked me to describe my race. In other words, to identify myself as either black or white. I used to check off "other" 'cause I see a lot of cultural differences between African-Americans and Jamaicans. But here, because you're a person of color, you're grouped into a racial category. I recently started identifying myself as black or African-American. I don't know why I just started doing that. I think being here has forced me to relate more to black people. With my sister, and even my mother who is definitely black, they still check off "other." They don't think it's anyone's business how they identify themselves. But for me, while I'm very proud of being Jamaican, I'm also proud of being African-American. I just can't deny who I am. And every chance I get, I get involved in promoting diversity on campus.



Crystal's background experiences have helped her to develop a better understanding of herself, to appreciate the accomplishments of African-Americans, and to become actively involved in social justice issues in Springfield and on campus.

Equally important is the fact that Crystal's background experiences have also helped her to move from the position of believing that individuals should not be classified according to race, to immersing herself with the idealization of African-American culture and blackness in what she considers to be a "racist society."

Since early childhood, Wayne has had a very clear understanding of his racial identity. In fact, growing up in Camden, one of the largest black communities in the state of New Jersey, Wayne was constantly surrounded by positive black role models. Included among these role models were his parents, who were strong, educated, and committed to social and political reform within the black community.

Throughout his childhood, Wayne's parents constantly reminded him of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and their role in the fight to end poverty, racial segregation, and other forms of individual and institutional racism. While enrolled in a predominantly white high school, Wayne's basketball skills allowed him to be easily accepted by white students, but despite his acceptance, Wayne never denied his blackness. Instead, his interest in black history and his need to be a positive role model for other black students became a very important issue for him.

My parents are black. Almost everyone I grew up with in my neighbourhood was black. And I'm black too. So it's almost impossible for me to deny who I am. Even when I went away to a predominantly white boarding high school and a predominantly white college, I could not forget that I am black. And I have almost always been in situations where white people didn't let me forget it either. So since high school, I have continued my parents' fight to end social inequality in whatever way I can.



At the time of his interview, Robert expressed very little hope for the future of African-American males growing up in the Greater Boston area. Tall, athletic, and very articulate, Robert believed that, like most black males, he “was born a statistic into a world in which there is a strong possibility that [he] may die at an early age.”

According to Robert, his physical appearance often makes him a target for “the racial violence and police brutality confronting African-Americans males throughout the United States.” Yet, despite his concerns, however, Robert remains secure in his identity. As a way of encouraging black males to succeed in college, Robert has become involved in various campus activities that he thinks will make a difference in helping aspiring African-American college students achieve their dreams.

Being bicultural, Wanda has always tried to embrace the rich diversity that characterizes her Jamaican and American heritage. According to Wanda,

I never really thought about it, but I consider myself West Indian and also Black. Although racial identity did not really become a concern for me until I came to the States, I now consider myself African-American. But, in many respects, that’s really a contradiction. While I now consider myself an African-American, I don’t have any American blood in me. But I am black.

During her interview, Wanda reflected on how, while growing up in Springfield, it was difficult for her to gain the acceptance of other black children in her neighborhood because of her bicultural heritage and the fact that she spoke what many of the black kids considered “proper English.” To this day, Wanda remembers clearly how a racial encounter that occurred when she was a young child has left her feeling angry, bitter, and deeply committed to fighting white racism and cultural prejudice among people of color.

I can recall being in the first grade. I'll never forget this. I only had white friends in first grade 'cause none of the black kids would talk to me because I was too dark in their opinion. They would call me "Blackie." And I would sit, most of the time all by myself, just traumatized. I ate lunch by myself because no one would talk to me. Not the black kids, and not the white kids. It was just horrible. I would drink so much white milk 'cause I thought it would make me white too. Then, I could fit in with the white kids. But it didn't. And still no one liked me. The black kids didn't even want to get to know me.

As Wanda grew older, these and other encounters with cultural prejudice and white racism only encouraged her to become even more determined to work toward improving social and cultural understanding within the black community of Springfield. In fact, as a teenager, Wanda became actively involved in her Sunday School, the youth ministry, and other peer education programs which she believed were committed to promoting diversity awareness. According to Wanda, "being a part of these organizations gave me what I needed to become a stronger person in my church, my school, and my community."

Wanda's involvement in promoting social change continued in high school, where she became a member of the Multicultural Committee and the Student Government. And, as the first black and female student body president of her high school senior class, Wanda recalled how she devoted a great deal of time working to "educate peers about the racial and cultural differences that make each of us special." She has also recalled experiences when she worked with various community agencies, educating "teenagers and adults about drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS prevention." Despite her active participation in various programs that promoted cultural awareness and understanding, Wanda admits that it was her "mother who instilled in [me] a sense of



racial and ethnic identity and helped [me] to develop a healthy and positive black frame of reference.”

As a Cape Verdean growing up in the West End of New Bedford, Elizabeth is personally tormented by the dilemma of racial classification. Although she is especially proud of her Cape Verdean heritage, Elizabeth has always had a difficult time accepting her racial identity, especially her bicultural heritage. According to Elizabeth, “my mother is of Cape Verdean descent and my father is African-American. So I guess you can say I have the best of both worlds.”

However, throughout high school, Elizabeth was encouraged by her mother to identify as either Cape Verdean or Portuguese, not as an African-American

My mother believed that, unlike African-Americans, Cape Verdean and Portuguese people had a much easier time assimilating into the dominant white culture. So she didn't want me to be African-American. Instead, she wanted me to classify as either Cape Verdean or Portuguese.

Unfortunately, in responding to questions about her heritage, it was difficult for Elizabeth to discuss the history of the Cape Verde Islands without first acknowledging the important influence of Africa culture. On the other hand, she really didn't know much about Portuguese history, except what her mother had told her.

It was only after taking a black history class at UMass Dartmouth that Elizabeth came to accept her black heritage and the fact that she could not continue to deny her family history. By identifying herself as African-American, Elizabeth was forced to confront the racism often encountered by other African-Americans in New Bedford and throughout the United States. During our interview, Elizabeth discussed various personal experiences that helped her to understand better her racial and cultural identity.



I grew up in New Bedford, but we eventually moved to a predominantly white neighbourhood in Acushnet. Throughout my elementary school and junior high experience, there were always racial problems, always, always. In my family, I'm the youngest of four girls. So I think my older sisters have had a lot more experiences with racial discrimination than I have.

I can remember there were times when my sisters and I would be standing out in front of our house playing and white kids driving by would scream out, "hey, you niggers!" Just like that. It didn't happen very often, but for me, once was enough. So I may be Cape Verdean, but I've always had a black experience. People in the New Bedford area don't see me as Cape Verdean either. They see me as African-American. Although I am comfortable with who I am, I know that some people don't care what I consider myself. To them, I'm only a person of color and they don't want to know me in any other way. I just can't stand all the racism in this area.

As a child, I always played sports, especially in gym class. But for the life of me, I have never been able to play basketball. I guess I never really liked it. But it always just struck me as funny that the white kids in my class always thought I could play, and I would get picked for every team. You know, I feel bad for them. They were really ignorant and it was almost like I had sympathy because they didn't know any better. And when it came to the cheerleading squad, they also wanted me to be part of that too. I guess so I could get some of the other black girls to participate. They just portrayed me as every stereotype you could imagine. It was funny. It did bother me because I really felt bad for them. You know, I had to go to school with white people most of my life. So I tried to adjust as best as I could.

As Della talked about childhood experiences that had a profound impact on her racial and cultural identity, she could not help but recall the discrimination and prejudice she experienced while growing up in a predominantly white neighbourhood in Dallas, Texas. These experiences only confirmed her belief that racism is very much alive and well in the South.

At one point in her life, Della was very determined to leave Texas, and move back to Ohio where she thought life for African-Americans was much better. In reflecting on the racism she and her family had experienced in Texas and in Ohio, Della

soon realized that she had taken on some of her mother's characteristics, particularly her mother's hatred for white people.

There were many, many days we would be walking down the street and a carload of white people would drive by and yell out some very racist names and then just carry on about their way. It just seems that in Texas, white people don't even try to disguise their racist behavior. And almost every morning my mother, I swear, would wake up yelling and screaming about how she did not like white people. So as a child, you can't help but assume the feelings and racial identity of your parents. I know I did. I guess you'd much rather know where someone was coming from then to have it disguise and later learn that they didn't want you there.

When I eventually moved to Washington, D.C., I was so happy 'cause there were so many people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. I had no idea that I would end up making friends with people from Ethiopia, Nigeria, Guyana, everywhere. I never thought how important it was for me to mix with people of different backgrounds, to learn a little more about different cultures, and that's helped me to understand who I am as an African-American.

While attending Boston Academy, a predominantly white high school, Brittany was never perceived by her peers as one who openly displayed her emotions or condemnation of racism or social segregation within the school. Unfortunately, Brittany's silence on these issues only caused some of the more militant black students in her high school to question her racial identity and her commitment to improving the social climate on campus. Some of the militant students even went so far as to argue that Brittany's silence on issues of social justice and her friendship with white students, was a clear indication that she did not want to be considered black. Yet according to Brittany,

I had no secret desires to assimilate into white culture. I've always had a black experience, including experiences of racism throughout high school. But I am not one who openly expresses my feelings about such matters. I have never been that way. Perhaps that's why some black students back in high school and here on campus often questioned my identity or challenged me to prove my blackness. But I know who I am. I dress like a



black person. I talk like a black person. And I walk around with braided hair. That should be enough to prove who I am.

Henrietta was not forced to confront her racial identity until she came to the United States. Although she has successfully learned to accept who she is, Henrietta sometimes gets very angry with friends who express a distorted view of African culture and history. However, Henrietta does not let her anger deny her the opportunity to teach others about what life is really like for black people in her native country and in the United States.

Being Ethiopian, I don't know what comes to everyone's mind when they think of African people. Some people are so ignorant about African culture. Perhaps they are influenced by the media, maybe what they read in history books or what they see in those old Tarzan movies. But I always try to teach them about my country. If I were in my native country and I had to sit down and write about my ethnic or racial identity, I would identify as either African or an Ethiopian African. But here in the United States, I identify only as an African-American. I don't have any problems with it because I always take pride in my identity.

Since high school, I have been outspoken about issues that had anything to do with my race or my cultural backgrounds, or anything like that. When I first came to the United States, I found that there were not enough students of color who made me feel comfortable about my identity. Where I came from, there were a lot more black students than there are here.

Sherron never lost her sense of identity with the peoples of Trinidad. In fact, throughout her childhood, she has traveled with her parents to the West Indies to visit family and friends, and to gain a better understanding of her cultural heritage.

Both my parents are from Trinidad, but my brother and I were born in Boston. It's funny, my mother asked me all the time how I identify myself racially. But I can't answer that question. I don't know why, but for me, that's not an easy question to answer. My brother and I were the first generation born in America. So we still identify with all our West Indian heritage. Although I consider myself black, I think people born in America, and living with American parents, are raised differently than people born with West Indian parents. I know my mother would not



hesitate to kick my behind, but a lot of American parents would not do that as quickly you know.

I've always related to white students. Since second grade, I've gone to predominantly white schools. So I know what it's like to be around a lot of white people. And I've experienced blatant racism before too. Like when this guy called me a nigger in 6th grade, and we got into a big fight. I can't even remember what happened to him. I just know that I got in trouble for fighting. I shouldn't have fought with him 'cause I got suspended. That was the last blatant act of racism I've actually experienced. But I know racist people are all around me. But I've been around racism so much that I don't pay attention to it as much as some people. Black students at the Unity House often go crazy over campus racism, but I'm at the point where I'm kind of numb to it now. I 'm sure I've experienced it so much that it's just like "whatever." I don't sweat it anymore.

For Ludovice, racial identity has never been an issue of concern. Because of the strong religious background she received while growing up in a black church, and the positive influence of her parents, Ludovice has always expressed confidence in her blackness. In fact, Ludovice remembers various childhood experiences that have helped to determine her identity and to influence her self-perception.

I know who I am. Although I must admit, I grew up differently than everyone else. When I grew up I had locks, curly locks, from like third grade on, and I looked awful. The kids in my class used to tease me 'cause I didn't have a natural, I had curly locks, and I really looked different. I always had a different personality, always a different person from everyone else. My father, I guess that's how he wanted it to be. He doesn't like religion now. But back then, he was really into a lot of different religions. I don't know too much about it. And I don't really want to get into it. I stay away from religion because, when my mother and father split up, it was because of religion. My mother was deeply religious. She became a Christian. I guessed because she was searching for the right way to live. Going though that black religions experience has helped me to become the person that I am.

When I was applying to college, I really didn't want to go to an all-white college 'cause I felt that I would be the only black person there. And, I was afraid that I would end up turning into one of them. I'm serious. I was afraid of sounding white, acting white, and not being me. Oh, my God! But now I don't mind interacting with white people. First of all, my

family is here. A lot of my family's here. And my family's so close, too. I think that it's very important for me to know my history, to know my background, to know who I am as a black person. Knowing that and having my family here, I feel comfortable. I would prefer to be around my own kind. But I don't have an identity crisis. I know that I am black. I'm black and proud.

During the interview, Lauren spoke of her African-Brazilian heritage and her experience with racism as factors that helped her to develop a positive self-image. As an adolescent growing up in Brazil, Lauren was fully aware of issues surrounding her racial identity and the fact that she is the descendant of an interracial marriage between white Portuguese and African slaves. Despite the diversity that characterizes her cultural heritage, at one point in her life, Lauren believed that it was simply much easier for her to deny her black heritage "in order to be accepted by white Brazilians." But, she quickly realized that, in the eyes of most white people, she was still black.

At the age of 21, Lauren entered the convent and became a nun. She later emigrated to the United States to fulfill religious obligations as a Dominican Sister. She says,

While many immigrants come to the United States for economic reasons or to find a better way of living, I came here because I was invited to come by the Sisters. And it is my religious belief that God wanted me to be here, too. So, for me, even though I am of African heritage, who I am racially is not important in the eyes of God.

Today, Lauren sees her racial identity differently. After taking a sociology course in racial identity development, she has a better understanding of her racial and cultural history. She now takes pride in knowing who she is in a society and a campus community that is richly diverse. According to Lauren,

Since being in college, I have had the chance to meet many people from different countries. And that's one change or cultural experience that has made me feel very, very content with who I am. So I'm not afraid to



acknowledge my African heritage. I know I'm Brazilian, but I also consider myself African-American 'cause I'm now here in the United States, and despite what God may think, our society still classifies people by race and the color of their skin.

Yvette was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Although her father is Italian and her mother is Cape Verdean, Yvette grew-up in a black community where she acquired various social and cultural values that helped her to establish her identity as an African-American.

I know I'm Cape Verdean. But I am also half white because of my father's side of the family. Although I consider myself black, being around African-American people, I sometimes feel that I am not black enough because of the way they react to me. But to tell you the truth, I'm really comfortable with who I am. I know who my parents are. And I really try not to get all caught up with issues of race or racial identity like most Cape Verdeans here at the university. We're all discriminated against despite whether we consider ourselves Cape Verdean or African-American.

Jackie is the child of an interracial couple. Her mother is Portuguese and her father is African-American. She says,

I don't think that being biracial really affects who I am or how people perceive me. Everybody has stereotypes about race. But as I talk to people, they know that I am not this stereotypical person. I do sometimes notice, however, that people sometimes stare at me. I strongly feel that there are a lot of people who are not open-minded to someone who is different. I don't want to say that I'm paranoid or anything. But I still notice even in certain group situations how people respond to me or just stare, perhaps because of the color of my skin.

Despite the stares, confrontations with racial stereotypes, and even questions about her identity, Jackie sees these experiences as opportunities to help her perceive social interactions with a different lens. Jackie's inner security and self-confidence about being black has also helped her to survive and thrive in a predominantly white college environment.



As an African-American, Ronald admits that he has experienced all kinds of prejudice while serving in the military. Ronald believes that his experiences with racism only confirm that “we do not live in a color blind society, and that issues of racial prejudice and discrimination are unfortunate experiences that people of color will always be confronted with, even at UMass Dartmouth.” As an ordained minister, Ronald says that his “religious training has helped me to gain greater control over my emotions and not to develop hatred for white people, which is often common in some black community.”

Although Mildred could not recall a specific moment during childhood that forced her to discover her racial identity, she did reflect on an experience at CCRI in which she became determined not to allow issues of racism or sexism to divert her dreams of earning a degree in engineering. According to Mildred, as a black woman in an academic program dominated by white males,

I always thought that men were smarter than women, especially in electricity, electronics, and other courses in the engineering program. Maybe they had more background, or maybe those guys came from a school where they had already been introduced to electricity classes. Anyway, I always felt stupid or academically inadequate ‘cause some of them were from a technical school, and I felt that I was competing with people who already knew what they were doing. And with me being the only black female, that made things really difficult to accept.

### Summary Analysis: Racial Identity Development

The process of racial identity development begins during childhood and is often influenced by various “encounters that shatter an individual’s current identity and world view” (Evans, Forney, & Giido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 74). The interpretation of such

encounters can have an immediate impact on one's self-perception and provide memories that later determine their social and interpersonal interactions in a particular social environment (Cross, 1995). For example, at a predominantly white college, race and perceptions of racial identity can influence the social adjustment and integration of African-American students within the college environment (Thompson & Fretz, 1991; Fisher & Hartiman, 1995; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Coakley, 1999).

In reflecting on the issue of racial identity development, almost all of the participating students recalled childhood encounters, including situations, statements, and actions they perceived to be racist. For some of them, it was extremely difficult to understand these encounters or even to discuss issues of racism with their parents. Yet the memories of these encounters and the powerful impact such experiences had on their identity development are real. Equally important is the extent to which these encounters continue to influence how students define their social interactions with white people. In this study, the influence of racist encounters on identity development can be summarized by one student who said, "My parents are black. Almost everyone I grew up with [are] black. And I'm black too. It's almost impossible for me to deny who I am. And I have almost always been in situations where white people didn't let me forget it either."

It should also be noted, however, that perceptions of white racism were not the only factors influencing students' identification with a particular race or ethnicity. A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the influence of family values, attitudes, and expectations about race on students' racial identity development. For example, one student, who is of Cape Verdean decent, shared stories about how her

parents instructed her to avoid associating with African-Americans, to deny her blackness, and to embrace her white heritage. She said, “My mother believed that, unlike African-Americans, Cape Verdean and Portuguese people had a much easier time assimilating into the dominant white culture. So, she didn’t want me to be African American.”

It should be noted, however, for some Cape Verdean students, assimilation and integration into the white world are not easily accomplished. In our society, race matters and so does the color of one’s skin. In fact, one African-American student who proudly acknowledged her biracial heritage noted, “Even though I am also of African heritage, who I am racially is not important in the eyes of God. But despite what God may think, our society still classifies people by race and the color of their skin.”

In their book The Color Complex, Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) illustrate how attitudes about skin color, hair texture, and facial features influence the self-perceptions of African-Americans and their interpersonal relationships with members of their social environment. They argue that “beneath a surface appearance of black solidarity lies a matrix of attitudes about skin color and features in which color, not character establishes friendships” (p. 1).

In this study, disturbing evidence of the power of the “color complex” was revealed in the story of various students. For example, in one case a student said, “I would drink so much white milk ‘cause I thought it would lighten my skin so I could finally fit in with the white kids. But it didn’t.” In another case, a student who acknowledged her biracial background believed that she was “not black enough.”



Throughout childhood, these students were challenged by issues of skin color and racial identity development. These issues not only forced them to question constantly their blackness, but they also had a negative affect on students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and social interactions. Yet being in a racially and culturally diverse college environment, taking courses in racial identity development, and, in some cases, being isolated from parents, are all factors that have helped these students to gain greater control over their emotions their racial identity, and their social perceptions.

It is interesting to note that although most of the participating students were from what some may consider "dysfunctional families," their family structure and various experiences within their family home environment provided them with opportunities to understand and enhanced their racial socialization. Of particular concern to some students were family discussions on issues involving black heritage and culture, perceptions of racism and discrimination, racial/ethnic identity development, and educational expectations. Thus, because of the racial socialization process that occurred within the family structure and home environment, the majority of the students who participated in this study expressed a positive sense of self while being well prepared for the racially hostile encounters normally expected in a predominantly white college environment.

#### Students' Involvement in Campus Social Activities

In this study, students were asked to discuss personal background experiences that influenced their perceptions of social integration, especially their involvement in campus social activities (Questions #9). In responding to this question, Crystal noted

that since moving on campus, she has been actively involved in various activities at UMass Dartmouth, including the United Brothers and Sisters (UBS), the Unity House, and a women's support group called Sister-Sister. She is also managing editor of a student-published campus magazine entitled The Black College Journal.

Crystal became involved in the development of this magazine for a number of reasons. The most important reason was to provide a voice for students of color in a campus environment where she strongly believes African-American students are invisible in the eyes of white America.

We started the magazine because we knew that there was nothing on this campus that truly represented all students of color. We also knew that there continue to be a lot of racial issues on campus, affecting students of color, which are not being addressed. So, we decided that while the magazine would maintain the integrity and sovereignty of all cultures, particular emphasis would be placed on the triumphs, successes, failures, hardships, and struggles of African-Americans who continue to be invisible in almost every aspect of campus life.

After arriving at UMass Dartmouth, Wayne was determined not to become involved in any campus social activities. Instead, his only desire was to become integrated into that aspect of the campus environment where learning and academic success were encouraged. According to Wayne,

When I first got here, I tried to become involved in various campus activities. But I soon realized that, as an older student, it was really difficult, because I'm not like other students. So I keep to myself as far as my personal and social life is concerned. Many of the students are just out of high school. I'm older. So I have to expect more from myself. I need to concentrate on my education. And since I've been here, I haven't hung out or anything like that. I'll say hi to people but it's not like I'm going to start hanging out, attend campus parties, or anything like that. I've had my fill of those kinds of activities. Besides, living off campus is like being apart from the whole college experience. I come to class. I go home. And that's it, unless I work out at the gym. I do try to stay in touch with friends who keep me informed about what's happening on campus.



If I lived on campus, things would be different. I mean, it would be possible for me to interact with a lot more students of color. I think it would be a lot better experience if I was living on campus. But right now I'm taking 18 credits and I don't even have time to sleep. I've given up weight lifting, basketball, all that. Every weekend, I'm in the books. I may go out to a movie once in a while or go to dinner but that's about it. I don't really have time to hang out.

Since enrolling at the university, Robert has been actively involved in campus life. Although he remains focused on his education, Robert has become a member of the chemistry club, the pre-med club, and the United Brothers and Sisters. According to Robert,

I'm involved in a number of activities on campus. Sometime I go over to the Unity House to tutor students who need help in the sciences. I'm also a member of the chemistry club and the pre-med club. Before I joined the pre-med society, I first had a discussion with some of the club members, and a few days later I got a letter inviting me to join. The faculty advisor of the pre-med club called me and personally invited me to a meeting. You know, he really seemed interested in me. And I thought that was pretty nice. I felt really welcome, although when I met with him, I was somewhat reserved. But he still made me feel very welcome.

At Springfield Tech, Wanda did not feel that there were enough students involved in the life of the campus. Wanda also felt that Springfield Tech did not provide enough social activities for students who wanted to get involved in valuable leadership experiences. She says,

Students at [Springfield Tech] were not as involved in college life as I had expected. In fact, a lot of people were returning students. They commuted in and they commuted out, never getting involved in any clubs or organizations. I couldn't wait to transfer to a four-year school with a real social life. Here at UMass Dartmouth, I'm involved in a number of clubs and activities on campus, like the Unity House, the Women's Center, and United Brothers and Sisters, all organizations that are working for social change.

Today, Wanda continues to be involved in various campus activities, particularly programs and activities that promote diversity awareness, racial



understanding, and social change among students. Her motivation to become involved in social activities centers on her belief that “there will never be a world with peace, love, and unity unless everyone is willing to do what is necessary to make social change a reality.”

As a commuter student, Mildred is not involved in student activities. The responsibilities of holding a full-time job, being a single mom, and taking care of an elderly parent leave her little opportunity to get involved in campus life. According to Mildred,

I don't have time for anything, you know. I have a very busy schedule. I have my son to take care of, and I have my mother to take care of too. So, I don't have any time to get involved in very many campus activities. I just go to classes and then home. I never really have time to interact with my peers either. I have a different kind of lifestyle than they do. Many of the students here have parents who support them. And, they have no other responsibilities except to go to class and get good grades. I have a family to go home to every night. I have adult responsibilities. They don't. So in many respects, our lives are different. Although I don't have time to interact with very many students on campus, they are still very nice to me.

Because she commutes to the university from home, it is sometimes difficult for Elizabeth to remain involved in social activities on campus. Yet, she manages to find time for those activities that are closely related to her major and that will provide her with valuable co-curricular experiences.

I live at home with my parents. There are a lot of things I would like to get involved in. But when you're still living with parents, things are different. You have to pick up this one. You have to make sure you're home for dinner and all that. It's tough. It's not easy. I was already used to living on my own. Sometimes my mother will ask me, “what time are you coming home?” And, it's like I wasn't used to that. Sometimes, my mother will not go to sleep until everyone is in the house. She will leave the screen door unlocked until everybody's home. So it's tough. I totally respect her because I'm under her roof. I totally abide by her rules. But it's tough, especially being in college. Although, I keep reminding myself

that living at home was my decision, it's sometimes difficult. But I just have to just live with it.

I try not to miss out on a lot of campus activity just because I live off campus. Whenever I can, I do participate in the Cape Verdean Student Association, the Women's Vision Program, and the National Art Educational Association (NAEA). Two of these activities, the Women's Vision Program and NAEA, are all-white. But that doesn't really bother me 'cause wherever I can, I talk with members of these organizations about diversity issues.

In addition to taking a full-course load, Raymond supports a house, a wife, and three young children who continue to demand a great deal of his attention. As a result, Raymond's commitment to achieving his educational dreams leaves very little time for involvement in social activities on campus or to developing friendships outside of class.

I have responsibilities. I have a house. I have 3 kids, and a wife. So I try to work as much as possible. When I went to LPN school, I worked full-time, whenever I could get a job. When I went to RN school, I decided that I wouldn't just go to school and not work. I went to school full-time and I worked full-time. It wasn't easy, but I remained focused. I knew I had to become certified as a registered nurse.

As I reflect on my experiences in the nursing program, I'm convinced that college is not designed for adults or returning students who have a lot of responsibilities. It seems to me that college is really for someone right from high school. There are so many obstacles facing adult students that it's sometimes difficult for me to remain focused. That's why I just attend classes at the university and then go straight back home. For me, students I meet in my classes are only associates, not friends. We talk about class stuff, and after that, it's time for me to go home. It's really hard to form any sort of relationships with my peers. So I go to classes, get my grades, and get out.

Being so far away from home has been extremely difficult for Della. Although she is doing well academically, she continues to struggle socially in a college environment that she feels is difficult to make friends.

Being new to UMass Dartmouth and to New England, I've tried very hard to be friendly to people, especially people of color. But there are a lot of people who are just rude and who would not speak and would not



look at me even if I said “Hi.” I used to hold people in really high esteem. Unfortunately, I would always get disappointed. I started withdrawing socially so I wouldn’t be disappointed anymore. I remain friendly in my own way. But lately, I keep to myself. I keep myself very secluded from the social life on campus because I have a difficult time with some people, especially some of the women of color.

When Brittany enrolled at UMass Dartmouth, it was her sister’s words of encouragement that helped her to make a successful transition into the university community. Since arriving on campus, Brittany has become involved in various clubs and organizations, and has established herself as a respected student leader. Recently, she was selected as a tour guide in the admissions office. She was also chosen as the editor of a national publication on outstanding black college students, and a resident assistant (RA) in the dormitory. Despite her involvement in campus activities, Brittany still earned a 2.8 cumulative grade point average at the end of fall semester, 1999, as a psychology major. She remains focused on her educational and career goals.

I’m trying to be more responsible by putting myself through school. I’ve always tried to be responsible and mature, and to take college seriously. Being here, I know how much more work I need to do to be successful, not only when it comes to paying for my education, but to better myself personally and academically. I have to develop a number of professional and interpersonal skills just in case I decide that I don’t want to do marriage therapy. I want to have a well-rounded college experience. I want to do more, and be more flexible in the things I might want to do later in life.

While attending Quinsigamond Community College, there were a number of factors that prevented Henrietta from participating in campus social activities: her status as a commuter, the restrictions placed on her by her parents, and the fact that she was attending classes with students much older than she. However, once she enrolled at UMass Dartmouth, and was out of her parents’ household, Henrietta became active



in campus life and treasured the opportunity to gain valuable leadership experience at the collegiate level.

At Quinsigamond Community College, I commuted to the campus. So I was basically there for class. I wasn't exposed to students of diverse racial or cultural backgrounds. However, when I came to UMass Dartmouth, I was immediately exposed to many culturally diverse students from all over the world. So I decided to work with diverse groups on this campus. I worked with United Brothers and Sisters. I worked with students at the Unity House. I organized the first international food bank which gave students a chance for a true cultural experience. Being from Ethiopia, I just felt that it was important for me to get involved in cultural affairs 'cause I know how it feels to be a minority in a white dominated society.

Sherron has limited her involvement in campus activities to the Unity House and the United Brothers and Sisters (UBS). Her major concern is not repeating the same mistakes that caused her dismissal for academic reasons from the University of Maryland.

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of my life, I went to a predominately white school. So, when it came time to go to college, I wanted the whole Black College experience. But when I got to the University of Maryland, I went crazy. I was too involved socially and that's why I didn't do well academically. So after transferring to Roxbury Community College, and having to get more serious about my education, I decided that, once I enrolled at UMass Dartmouth, I would limit my involvement in social activities. So I'm somewhat involved with the Unity House and the United Brothers and Sisters. And I'm friends with a number of other black students who are involved in these organizations. But I go home every other weekend and I work those weekends at a hospital in Boston. It's a good job. It's paying for my education. So like most of the money I make, I just leave in the bank, 'cause I know that I have to pay for my education next semester. I'm working, and it's cool. I think this will be my second year working at the hospital.

Ludovice has adjusted quite well to the university both socially and academically. However, there are times when she is distracted by various personal issues, such as financial debts, her parents' divorce, and pressure from her father "to hurry up and finish college." Living on campus, Ludovice has been able to develop

close friendships with a number of students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. These students have helped Ludovice with her distractions. Becoming involved in campus social activities has also helped Ludovice's pain and sorrow diminish.

I really enjoy being here. At first I thought I would have a difficult time adjusting. But I'm just lucky to have so many friends here on campus. I'm thinking about going on to graduate school and getting my masters. My dad wants me to hurry up and finish college. But I have no idea what I want to do, you know. I do know that I need to make money 'cause I'm poor and I have so many bills it's ridiculous. I sometimes wonder what I'm going to do after college. All the pressure to get good grades and to find a good-paying job, sometimes it's just too much for me to handle. Sometimes I think I'm going crazy. But I really can't talk with my father about these issues. He just does not understand.

A Dominican nun, Lauren does not have the time to get involved in the social life of the university or to develop close relationships with faculty or other students. Although she is very much interested in what happens on campus, Lauren's deep religious commitment and the activities associated with her church take precedence over campus social life.

Basically, all I do is study. I am involved in community activities but not community activities within the university environment. Instead, I'm involved with the Dominican Sisters. I am involved with my community, the church. My time on campus is really limited and I don't really get involved in socializing with other students. I sometimes will talk with my teachers after class. But then I go straight to the library. I usually leave campus early in the evening to meet with my Sisters at the convent. After that, I pray and then I study. That's all I really have time for.

As a single parent, Yvette does not have much time for social activities on campus. She says, "I come to school and after classes I have to leave. I can't really socialize like most students 'cause I am a single parent. I have a lot of responsibilities,



and I have to be a role model for my daughter, and that's really all I have time for right now."

Currently, Jackie commutes to the university from the Cape. The round-trip commute of over 100 miles, three times a week, leaves very little time to get involved in campus social life. Instead, she devotes a great deal of time volunteering at several off-campus activities, including the Names project, Head Start, an AIDS Awareness program, a floral design business, and a pre-school in her hometown.

Ronald's social activities on campus are limited because of his religious beliefs, his position as an ordained minister, and his recent marriage to a classmate. Yet, he has managed to find time to assist with programming activities for the Black Student Union, the Cape Verdean Student Association, and the Catholic Youth Ministries, a religious organization open to students of all religious denominations.

#### Summary Analysis: Students' Involvement in Campus Social Activities

Sherron, Ludovice, and Wayne all attended a four-year institution before transferring to a two-year community college. Their experiences at their previous four-year college were typical of those encountered by traditional students who enter a college directly after high school. In other words, by living on campus, they were afforded the opportunity to form new friendships, establish their identity, and to engage in various social activities whenever they wanted to, independent of their parents.

Unfortunately, it was their involvement in campus social activities and their inability to focus on the academic demands and responsibilities of college life that led to their dismissal from the initial four-year institution and subsequent enrollment at a



community college. In commenting on his social integration at Millersville, Wayne mentioned, "I was too involved in clowning around and just hanging out with my friends. Going to class just wasn't that important." Reflecting on her social experience at the University of Maryland, Sherron noted, "I decided to transfer before I was kicked out for fighting or kicked out for bad grades. I was just too involved socially in the black experience." Finally, Ludovice admitted that "Clark Atlanta was a real party school and I partied almost every day. Well, maybe a little bit too much 'cause I didn't do well academically."

Fortunately, by the time they matriculated at a community college, Sherron, Wayne, and Ludovice understood the importance of a college degree and as Wayne said, "the need to get more serious about my education." Sherron, Wayne, and Ludovice also knew that their enrollment at a community college was perhaps an important step in their attempt to continue their education at the collegiate level. So, while enrolled at the community college, neither wanted to jeopardize their chances of being able to transfer by over-involvement in campus social activities.

Currently, Sherron and Ludovice have limited their involvement in campus social life to a few co-curricular activities. Yet they remain focused on their educational goals and concerned about maintaining academic progress. Wayne, however, is totally removed from campus social life because of his full-time employment and the fact that he lives off campus. He says, "it's not like I'm going to start hanging out, attend campus parties, or anything like that. I've had my fill of those kinds of activities."

Although Sherron, Ludovice, and Wayne continue to believe that social integration is an important aspect of college life, they do not feel the need to become overly involved in co-curricular activities. Instead, they are quite satisfied with the extent to which their interactions with peers, faculty, and administrative staff provide them with a sense of integration into both the academic and social systems of the college environment.

On the other hand, Henrietta, Crystal, Robert, Brittany, and Wanda all believe that their active participation in on-campus social activities has heightened their social integration into the university. However, rather than becoming involved in clubs and organizations simply to socialize, they have decided to identify with campus activities that are related to their major, their career aspirations, and the promotion of social justice. For example, Crystal, who wants to be a lawyer, is managing editor of The Black College Journal; she is gaining valuable experience as a writer, investigator, and editor, all important skills that will definitely help her in law school.

Robert, who wants to attend medical school, is a member of the chemistry club and the pre-med club. He also tutors other African-American students who need help in the sciences.

Wanda, who has aspirations to someday become a college professor, actively participates in clubs and organizations that promote social change. Brittany, who has had thoughts of becoming a marriage counselor, was recently hired as a resident assistant (RA) in the freshman dormitory, and can counsel many freshmen. Henrietta, who also wants to attend law school, is involved in the development of programs to assist students of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds adjust to the university. For



the remaining students who participated in this study, family commitment, employment responsibilities, religious obligations, and their status as commuter students are factors that prevent them from becoming socially integrated through extracurricular activities on campus. Yet, they remain connected to campus social activities through peer associations.

Finally, although students' responses to questions on their involvement in campus social activities were diverse, they revealed patterns of social integration that are characteristic of the social experiences of most community college students (Fisher & Hartmann, 1995). For example, research on the social integration of community college students suggests that these students are naturally "low in both academic and social integration relative to students in other types of institutions" (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983, p. 319). Thus, in this study it was expected that most students would experience difficulty engaging in the social life of the campus and finding personal satisfaction in campus social activities because of external campus obligations and responsibilities. It was also expected that students who do get involved in campus social activities would be less engaged but focused on social activities that could provide experiences that are most relevant to their personal or educational development. In reading the narrative profiles of each of the students, these two expectations were clearly revealed.

#### Students' Classroom Interactions

In this study, students were asked to discuss classroom experience, involving faculty and student peer, that have influenced their sense of integration into the social

environment of the campus (Question #15). In responding to these questions, Mildred reflected on the experiences of being the only black female in a predominantly white engineering program.

I've had a number of bad experiences with faculty here at the university. I remember I had this professor who was teaching measurements, I think electronic measurements. I don't remember his name. Anyway, I couldn't figure out if that guy was a racist or what. He treated me really badly. One day after class, I gave a friend a ride home. On the way to her house, she started to tell me that she didn't know how I was able to endure all that this teacher put me through. And I said, "well you know I am in school and there is nothing I can do about it."

Later that week, I talked to some of my friends about that same teacher 'cause they could see what he was doing to me all semester long. They believed that he was just trying to humiliate me and harass me in front of the whole class. After class one day, I was so upset that I called my mom and told her what that professor was putting me through. For example, whenever I talked to him, he didn't even look at me. I seriously think he hated my guts. At first, I thought that maybe he was a member of the KKK or something. I really had bad feelings about him.

In that same class, there was this Hispanic student. I noticed that he treated her differently. She wasn't as light as him but she wasn't white either and he treated her with more respect. But I never ever approached him about the situation. I heard that some of the students in my class were going to talk to the dean of the department of engineering about how that teacher was treating me. I don't know if they actually spoke with the dean or not. But I think they fired that professor, 'cause I never see him around campus anymore.

He ended up giving me a much lower grade than I actually deserved but I didn't complain. I accepted my grade, which was a C+, but I expected more because that Hispanic girl didn't even do all the coursework by herself. In fact, she was getting a lot of help from that teacher. But he still gave her an "A," which wasn't fair. Sometimes I just get tired of fighting the system. I don't know what to expect from teachers here at the university. I just don't understand why some of them have acted so racist towards me.

I had another teacher who treated me really badly. Maybe he was having personal problems, I don't know. Anyway, he was rude to me almost all the time. He kept putting me down. Sometimes, I just wasn't comfortable talking with him or even being in the same room with him. Once, he even



tried to humiliate me in class. So I just got up, left the classroom, and went outside and started crying. Finally, some of the students who walked out of class too came over to me. When half of the students walked out, he finally just dismissed class. He later called me to apologize. And I told him, "I don't know if you're a racist or a sexist or what. But you have a problem with me and I don't think it's my fault." I knew he had a problem with students of color being in his class, but he shouldn't take it out on me. I asked him if he was a racist or sexist and he said, "no." He again started to apologize and from that day on he treated me really nicely. With all of the complaints against him, I guess he was afraid of losing his job.

In reflecting on her classroom experiences, Mildred also discussed how she felt discriminated against by her faculty advisor. At first, she was a little reluctant to reveal details. However, Mildred explained that she could no longer remain silent about the racism she has encountered in the community college system and at UMass Dartmouth. She says,

As far as my advisor is concerned, I'm really scared of going to talk with him. When I leave his office, I always feel so depressed and down. It's like somebody put me down. I always feel like a jerk, you know. And I don't deserve that. I don't know if it's because he thinks that I'm a woman or because I'm an African-American or just what. This whole thing really disturbs me, and I just have to talk about it. Once, I went to talk with him, to tell him that I'm not stupid but that I just have problems concentrating in class. And he told me, "if you're not stupid, then prove it" or something like that. At that point, I just wanted to run out of his office.

Coming from a predominantly black institution, Sherron preferred the teaching style and classroom interactions of black professors. She believed that black professors were more sensitive to the needs of students of color and willing to provide the kind of mentoring necessary in a collegiate environment. When she applied for admission to the university, Sherron was fully aware that there were very few black professors on campus. Yet, she expected white faculty on staff to be sensitive to the needs,

expectations, and learning styles of diverse students because of all the attention given to the faculty-student relationship in the admission bulletin.

According to Sherron, “in the admissions publications, they’re always talking about the faculty-student relationship and how faculty are dedicated to teaching, research, and academic advising. So, I just assumed that this applied to all faculty, not just black professors.”

However, when she arrived on campus, Sherron quickly concluded that the quality of classroom and faculty interactions depended more on the racial background characteristics of student than anything else. She explains:

I had my first black teacher this semester. I don’t even know her last name. But she’s a jazz teacher. When I first met her, I was like, “Wow! there’s a black teacher on campus, oh my goodness!” When I attended the first class meeting, I was so happy that I got all red. It’s true. We need more black professionals on campus. I’m sick of going to class and sitting in front of a white person who doesn’t really care about me or who doesn’t understand anything about where I come from.

There are times when I sit in the front of the class and there are times when I sit in the back. It really depends on the teacher and whether or not I feel comfortable, especially if there are a lot of white students in the class. Sometimes I’ll even sit in the middle and I’ll ask questions. When I don’t feel comfortable in a class, I just sit in back. I take notes, but I don’t really ask too many questions. Sometimes, I really feel insecure about being in a class full of all white students.

I really feel more comfortable around black faculty. But like I said, so far, I’ve only had one at this college. And to me, she was just so down to earth, you know. She’s not like some of the white professors who don’t seem to care about students, whether the students are black or white. There are so many white professors on this campus who feel like they have to be in charge and that students have to believe everything they say. With those professors, I just back away. I’m just as strong headed as they are. I can be very opinionated in some classes. And the teacher is like, “You can’t be that way in my class.” But white professors don’t always understand our needs. They’re not sensitive at all and they don’t really understand what we need to make it through this university. So I don’t particularly care for white teachers.



I also don't participate in class discussions as much as I should. It seems that the white kids can go in class and say whatever they want. But we can't do that, 'cause when we do, white professors and white students look at you like you're crazy. Then they'll say, "What are you talking about?" And being the only black student in a class of white kids can really be intimidating. It's like, "Oh, I don't want to say this and look like a fool or the teacher might come out and criticize me." But there are a lot of different reasons why I don't speak up in class - feeling intimidated, looking stupid, being alienated. Those are only a few of the reasons. So I pretty much keep my comments and my questions to myself. I participate as much as I need to, but not enough. I don't speak enough. I really just say enough so that my grade won't be affected.

During the course of her reflection, Sherron talked about how a white faculty member often complained that black students should not be allowed to take courses at the university because of their SAT scores. Sherron had heard white teachers make similar comments before, but that was when she was in high school. According to Sherron,

Throughout my life, I've always experienced racism in the classroom. Most of my teachers have been white and now that I think about it, I've been fighting the same racial stereotypes all my life. Last semester, I was told by one of my teachers that I wasn't going to pass his class. He said, "students like you have a difficult time passing my course." Well, I just ended the conversation with him because I felt that he was ignorant, and foolish. To think I can't succeed or pass his class because of the color of my skin. So I said to myself, "I'm going to prove him wrong by succeeding." But white teachers always think that black students can't do college level work just because of what a student gets on the SAT exam.

Since leaving the University of Maryland, Sherron has developed a clear understanding of the importance of a faculty academic advisor. However, in reflecting on her experiences with the faculty advising process, Sherron points out that it is difficult to establish a relationship with some white faculty advisors on campus.

I was told that everyone is assigned an advisor. But I don't know whomy advisor is. I'm still trying to find out who that person is so that I can work with him or her. But right now, I have no idea. When I came

to orientation, some guy helped me to make out my schedule. I think he was from the political science department. But I don't remember his name. I guess I was never assigned an academic advisor. I just went to him and when I did my schedule for this semester, I went to some other guy. So I haven't really been assigned an academic advisor. It's really difficult to form a relationship with a faculty advisor if you don't know who to go to.

During her first semester on campus, Crystal encountered a number of health-related problems that almost forced her to withdraw from the university. However, she was able to continue at the university because of the assistance she received from the Dean of Students.

Last semester, I had like 20 advisors. I've never really met my assigned advisor who is some professor in the English Department. But I go to anyone and everyone I can see when I need to. I'm very bold and if I need a question answered, I'll just go up and ask any faculty advisor. It doesn't matter to me. That's just the way I am. But my adopted advisors and the Dean of Students have both been very helpful. When I had to go in for my surgeries, they made sure that I didn't get penalized for not getting my class assignments in on time, and that professors didn't rush me in getting work done quicker than I was physically able to. Quite often, my advisor and the Dean of Students would encourage me to work at my own pace. And I really appreciated their help cause they were always there for me.

Once in a while, you can find a professor who'll be very interested in you. And, if you do, get their e-mail and their phone number. If you can get a professor's home phone number, get it and use it as often as you need to. Also, I found that if you have problems, say, like with your grade, your final grade, and you really don't think you deserve that grade, you can call that professor and they will change your grade if you talk to them. A lot of students don't believe you can do that, but I've done it a few times.

Once I got a B- or something like that and I got the professor to change it to say a B+ or A-. When I get the final grade, I'll call the professor and ask, "are you sure that I'm supposed to get that grade?" Sometimes, they could make an honest mistake. I've just been very lucky with most of my professors. I don't know. But I've gotten some really bad ones too. I mean, I've gotten a couple of professors who were just horrible. I mean, they seem supportive and try to encourage me in their classes, but I sometimes resent their Eurocentric way of teaching. You know, everything white must be right.



Sometimes I wish I had all black professors. But I don't see too many black professors on this campus. All told, I think there are about 5 of them. There's a new one that just came in the English Department, and I took a class with him last semester. I also had classes with black professors in the Education Department and in the College of Business. I feel more comfortable with professors of color. I enjoy their classes a little bit more. I don't know why that is but I do. I guess it's because I haven't come across a black professor who is boring. Their classes are usually lively to me. They usually talk about issues I care about and issues that relate to me. For example, I had Professor Thomas for African-American history and Professor Russell for sociology. I think of them as mentors 'cause I see them all the time. Even professor Johns from the English Department. He's just brilliant. On the other hand, I had a white professor who was teaching philosophy of law. And every time I asked him a question, he was like, "well I'll have to go look that up." He knew nothing and I said, "so you're teaching a course you know nothing about?" I've had a lot of professors who didn't seem to know their subject. As a person of color, I feel that we have to fight harder to get more faculty of color. White professors can make all kinds of mistakes but black professors have to be twice as good.

In further discussing classroom experiences, Crystal focused on how she occasionally feels alienation in the presence of white faculty and white students.

I've been in classes where you look around and you're the only person of color. So being the only black person in class does intimidate you somewhat. I'm fortunate in the sense that I grew up in a multiracial family. So I don't feel too uncomfortable around white people. Although I can see how some black students or even white students could feel uncomfortable in a situation where they are the only ones. I've been in classes where I was the only person of color and the subject of black crime would be discussed, or someone would start complaining about the Unity House, and I find myself having to defend black people and their accomplishments. Sometimes, I tend to be the spokesperson for African-Americans. And when I do, I often feel as though I'm being attacked. So, I can see why students of color would feel intimidated in a class full of white people. I just see it to be very problematic. It's unfortunate, but people just don't see you as an individual. They only see what race you are and expect you to have all the answers about why people of color act the way they do in American society. But I'm no Jesse Jackson. And I don't want to speak for anybody but myself.

In discussing her perceptions of classroom experiences and interactions, Elizabeth appeared very angry discussing how it feels to be the only African-American

student in class. Elizabeth's voice would sometimes quiver as she stared at the floor and spoke of the insensitivity, stereotyping, and racist comments of white students who had very little connect with African-Americans.

At times, Elizabeth appeared deeply affected by the fact that she was pursuing a major in which there are only a few students of color. She was especially angry when she talked about several white faculty members who consistently try to encourage her to specialize in art dealing only with African-American culture.

I truly believe that, for some of the white students in my classes, I'm the only black person that's ever sat near them or who they've ever talked with. I know a lot of white students that have never had a black person in their home, which is ok. But for some of them, I'm the closest they'll ever come to being friends with -- or for that matter even to know -- a person of color.

In class, I sort of feel responsible for making sure that I present myself as being a very well-educated black woman. I'm one of a handful of black students majoring in art education. So when it comes to doing research projects or any kind of sculpture I tend to always do things that relate to black culture. Sometimes, I don't mind doing this. But for some reason, my teachers always expect me to focus on black art. I can remember when my white classmates saw a black sculpture that I had done. I think it was a black angel. And they were like "Oh, wow! isn't that nice! You made a little black angel!"

I sometimes share with classmates my feeling about race, racial relationship, and discrimination. I share these things with them 'cause I think that if I'm the only black person they'll ever know, then they need to be somewhat educated about black culture. Some of them I know have racist attitudes.

Sometimes, I talk with my white friends about black social groups on campus -- you know, the United Brothers and Sisters and the Cape Verdean Student Association. I give them various articles that deal with issues from a black perspective, and I have them read through it. I never thought this would happen: me teaching them about black history. But many white students in my classes still have no idea about diversity or life outside of their own little circle 'cause they're segregated from black students on campus. When you think about it, there aren't that many places on campus where students of color can go and feel welcome or



comfortable. So, I think my white classmates can learn a lot from what I have to say and the things I sometimes give them to read.

But it's really discouraging and, for the life of me, I don't understand why some white people think the way they do. We are in college. We should be more educated about racism and things like that. We should be more open-minded, but there are still a lot of people who are ignorant and who are afraid of socializing with other cultural groups, be it another athletic group, religious groups, or students of color. I mean they are just afraid and they don't know how to approach those who are different. There are just too many racial cliques on this campus, people saying "no, don't talk to them cause they're different." That's what bothers me the most about this campus, but I think it's everywhere, but especially in the classroom.

At the time of his interview, Raymond was perhaps the only black male student majoring in nursing, a program dominated by white females. Thus, he often feels challenged not only by the academic demands of the curriculum, but also by gender issues and by racial stereotypes of African-American students. In sharing his classroom experiences, Raymond mentioned how he often feels discriminated against by his white classmates and his professors.

According to Raymond, sometimes his classmates perceive him as the leading authority or spokesperson on health related issues affecting people of color. While he sometimes enjoys participating in classroom discussions on race-related issues, Raymond resents the assumptions that the health and welfare of African-Americans should be the sole responsibility of other African-Americans.

I try very hard to participate in class discussions. But I don't actually see myself as part of the class. If I need to say something or think that I should say something, I don't hesitate to speak out. I think that it's natural for you to feel comfortable talking to your own kind, there is nothing wrong with that. But you have to reach out to everyone. That's where the learning experience comes from. Everyone brings something different to the classroom.

White students might not like everything I say or accept everything I believe, but they should be willing to hear my point of view. As a nursing

major, I try to interact with all students and to learn from their experiences. And I honestly believe that they learn from me. My personal disappointment, though, is that there are not many students of color majoring in nursing. There is a great need for minorities in the field of health education, especially nursing. So, I feel that it is up to the administration to recruit more students of color into the nursing program.

When you're the only minority in class, all eyes are on you and you are the one that everybody else uses to judge students of color. In almost all my nursing classes, for example, there are discussions on the health care of minorities. And as soon as the conversation starts, all eyes are on me. I really don't have the pleasure of just sitting back and remaining silent 'cause if I don't speak out there's nobody in class who will discuss issues from the perspective of a person of color. As the only black student in a class full of whites, they also think of that as my role. They see me as the authority on all black issues. I should be able to be like a reporter and just read the news and not take the side of minorities. But, that's not the case. It's never the case.

Sometimes I don't always want to raise my hand or participate in class discussions, to ask a question or to tell my professor that I don't understand something. If I don't understand, what I normally try to do is to seek out somebody in the class who could help me. I talk to everyone. I'm pretty easygoing and I try to get along with anybody.

Ludovice attended a historically black college where she was surrounded by other African-American students who were engaged in the college environment. So the issue of being academically or socially isolated was never a challenge for her. However, at UMass Dartmouth, Ludovice has tried very hard not to let her feelings of being isolated in the classroom interfere with her educational plans.

When I was in high school, I was determined to go to a black college because I really did not want to go to an all-white college where I would be the only black person. I just didn't want to be in classes where there were all white people. Now, although I'm the only black person in almost all of my classes, that doesn't bother me, it really doesn't. I know this is a white school. For that matter, this is also a predominantly white country too. But I'm here to do what I have to do to get my degree. I am not worried about there being too many white people here. I don't have an identity crisis. My only concern now is to get my degree and get out of here.



For Wayne, perceptions of racism were manifested in the way some white students refuse to assist him or to share with him information on class assignments and special projects.

If I miss a class or something, very seldom do the white students let me borrow their notes. On several occasions, I've had white students say to me, "I'm not helping you, you do it on your own." But that's not the way they treat each other. I see them helping each other all the time. It's like they're picking each other up and trying to push you down. I really think they're being racist. I don't think they know how to deal with minorities. I wasn't asking for sympathy or anything like that. But I don't know, it just doesn't seem like they want to go out of their way to help me or any of the other minorities in class. It just seems to me that we're always fighting the perception that black students, particularly black athletes, can't compete academically. But knowing how white students feel about African-Americans has made me a stronger person. I mean, I've learned how to become really independent. I've learned how to do things on my own now and to get things done despite what they think.

According to Henrietta, there is currently only one professor of African-American descent who holds a tenured position within the English Department. She therefore believes that the absence of a black role model in the English Department is problematic and is discouraging to students of color who aspire to major in creative writing.

My biggest challenge or concern when I arrived at this school was learning how to deal with the racist perceptions and stereotypes of some of the professors in the English Department. There are not a lot of students of color majoring in English. I'm probably the only one. And I don't feel like the professors in the English Department are open to students of different races and cultures. I can remember having this one specific professor who was blatantly racist. So for me, it's hard to deal with people like that who hold a high position at the university. It's also hard for me to communicate with professors in the English Department. I feel I've run into too many professors who are basically racist and who often make racist comments in class. And I just hate the fact that there is only one black professor in the whole English Department. I never see him 'cause he teaches freshman level courses.

This past fall, I was the only student of color in my 300- and 400-level English classes. So it was hard for me to express myself without thinking that I just might be offended by someone making a stupid comment about

the way I talk or write. I know I talk with a slight accent. But so what. That's just something I have to deal with.

### Summary Analysis: Students' Classroom Interactions

In his theory on college persistence, Tinto (1975) asserts that academic integration, particularly successful classroom interactions, is important in helping students to feel connected to the institution and socially integrated into the college environment. Further research by Volkwein, King, and Terenzini (1986) suggest that connectedness to the institution and social integration are greatest in classrooms where "faculty give meaningful out-of-class assignments, have intellectually stimulating class sessions that hold students' attention, and encourage students to express their views in class" (p. 426).

Unfortunately, it is clearly evident from student narratives that classroom experiences do not provide them with the opportunity to feel connected to the university or integrated in the social life of the campus environment. Instead, most of them spend a great deal of time trying to develop strategies to cope with perceptions of racism in the classroom. As discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter, two of the most common strategies employed by African-American students include those involving oppositional behavior and self-segregation.

In their response to the question on classroom experiences, students also discussed how perceptions of racism and other negative classroom experiences often leave them feeling "humiliated," "uncomfortable," and "depressed," and often wondering "why some white people think the way they do." Being the only African-American in a classroom full of white students greatly enhanced such feelings,



especially when participating students were expected to be the spokesperson or “expert” on the “black experience.” Although most of them welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences or issues affecting people of color, some feel that they “must” voice their opinions about such issues. For example, Raymond noted that, “I really don’t have the pleasure of just sitting back and remaining silent ‘cause if I don’t speak out, there’s nobody in class who will discuss issues from the perspective of a person of color.”

The challenge of being the only black students in class – in effect, the authority on matters affecting people of color or the individual responsible for educating whites on issues of racism and cultural diversity – was extremely demanding for some African-American students. As a result, not all are interested in becoming black leaders in the classroom. Nor are they willing to accept the criticism that sometimes comes with assuming a leadership role on issues that promote or concern diversity. In fact, many of the students who participated in this study wanted to be accepted only as scholars or simply students seeking an education.

Another issue that emerged from this analysis involved students’ feelings that some white faculty members remain insensitive to the needs, expectations, and learning styles of African-American students, despite university publications that portray UMass Dartmouth as serious about the development of faculty-student relationships.

Although students appreciate taking courses with the few African-American faculty members, it is the insensitivity of white faculty members that often leave black students feeling isolated, personally dissatisfied, and stressed because of perceptions of racism in a hostile classroom environment.

Finally, many of the participating students were disappointed that they were not able to establish the kind of relationship with a white faculty member that would enable them to become fully engaged or integrated into the classroom experience. Yet most refused to allow perceptions of racism and prejudice in the classroom to impede their feeling of connectedness to the university or to impede their social integration into the life of the campus.

### Student-Faculty Interactions

In this study, students were asked to discuss their interactions with administrative staff, faculty, and academic advisors (Question #14). In responding to this question, there was great diversity in the perceptions of participating students. Yet their perceptions revealed diverse needs, expectations, experiences, and levels of maturity. For example, in commenting on his experiences with classroom faculty, Raymond mentioned:

I can remember in one of my classes, I didn't understand what the heck was going on. I went and asked the instructor and after that I received an A on my first paper. For the next assignment, I also went to explain to him that I didn't understand. And after that my grade just went down. So I decided that it's not going to happen to me again. I'm just going to ask another student or try to figure it out myself before I go to my instructor. I know how some faculty see students of color, especially those students who go to their instructor for help. I think most instructors don't actually know what kind of student you are unless you test poorly or show signs of weakness. I guess that's the only way they would be able to find out your strengths and weaknesses, 'cause they're not going to follow you around to every class. You only have them for one course. So if you are able to get another student to help you catch on to whatever the professor is teaching, that's what I recommend. But if early in the course you admit to your professor that you are weak in a particular area, then more or less you're marked or targeted for a lower grade. And being the only minority in the class you don't always want to put up your hand showing that you don't understand something.



Wanda has also had a very positive relationship with most of her professors. Although Wanda enjoys both black and white faculty members, she admits that her outside-of-classroom experiences with black faculty are much richer and much more valuable to her own personal and educational development.

I've had such good experiences here, especially with the faculty, both black and white. They've really been open and really helpful. They're always available during office hours and they're always willing to help me whenever necessary. They seem to appreciate it when I come to their office for advising or just consultation.

Outside of class, several of my classmates and I have gone on a few trips with some of the black faculty. For example, we've gone to Philadelphia to attend a conference with one of the English professors. He actually invited us to go this semester even though I'm not taking his class. And, although I'm not taking Professor Simmons' class this semester, I've gone with him to New York to promote his new book on college student development. Sometimes I wish I could develop the same kind of relationship with white faculty 'cause there are more of them. And almost all of the African-American students go to the few black faculty on campus. There are just not enough black faculty on campus.

I do find that there is a difference between older and younger professors here at the university. I'm more relaxed with the younger professors than I am with older ones, 'cause I feel like I have more in common with the younger ones. It's like we can talk more on my level and I don't feel like they're trying to bring me down. On the other hand, I have the hardest time talking with older professors. I don't know, it's just harder for me 'cause some of them are nationally-known. But for the most part, I have a pretty good relationship with all of my professors. I don't let race influence my relationship with any of my professors. I treat them with respect and they treat me with respect too.

For some students, however, it has been quite difficult for them to relate to white faculty because of the perception that they appear to be racist, prejudiced, or simply uninterested in the personal and educational development of students of color. For example, when asked if she felt white professors discriminated against her, at first Mildred denied that such incidents ever occurred. Then she talked about a recent

interaction with a faculty who she believed cared very little about integrating students of color into the classroom.

Every time I meet with some of the white teachers, I feel really uncomfortable. It's like my heart is going to stop or it's going to come out of my mouth. I just don't want to see my advisor or to talk to him unless it's absolutely necessary. I just don't want to go to his office 'cause I'll feel even more depressed after our meeting. Believe me, my advisor sometimes makes me feel like a loser. Maybe he thinks all black people are losers. I don't know.

So why should I go see him at all? I seriously don't think my advisor cares about me as a student or as an individual. I feel like he treats me like garbage. So I see him only when they tell me that I have to see an advisor to register for classes. Then I say to myself, "Oh my God!" And I start feeling depressed all over again.

Sherron knows the importance of a faculty academic advisor. However, in reflecting on her experience with the faculty advising process, Sherron makes the point that it is difficult to establish a relationship with someone she has never met.

I was told that everyone is assigned an advisor. But I don't know who my advisor is. I'm still trying to find out who that person is so that I can work with him or her. But right now, I have no idea. When I came to orientation, some guy helped me to make out my schedule. I think he was from the political science department. But I don't remember his name. I guess I was never assigned an academic advisor. So I just went to him, and when I did my schedule for this semester, I went to some other guy. So I haven't really been assigned an academic advisor. So it is really difficult to form a relationship with a faculty advisor if you don't know who to go to.

Ludovice's sentiments clearly demonstrate their understanding of the importance of establishing a strong interpersonal relationships with their faculty and academic advisors.

I guess UMass Dartmouth was the best choice for me. It's a good school academically. Although, I must admit that the social life here is horrible. But that's good 'cause its made me concentrate more on academics. I'm sure there are other colleges that are much better academically and socially. But the fact that this school has a smaller community was important to me. I like the fact that most of my classes are about 30 students if not less. I've been in some classes where there were about 80



students, but most of my classes are small. I probably would not have transferred here if it were not for the fact that the university offers smaller classes and the faculty is supposed to be accessible. I guess I'm happy with my decision. I'm really satisfied with my professors and my advisor is great. I only wish that my advisor or at least one of my teachers could be a true mentor for me. I want to go to graduate school. And I know, to get there, I just need the support of faculty in my department.

### Summary Analysis: Student-Faculty Interactions

Research on college student development suggests that the quality of faculty “academic advising process has the potential to provide a vital link between [students] and the college, [to] reduce alienation and enhance learning, and contribute to a student’s sense of belonging to the college environment” (Kramer & Kramer, 1989, p. 106). In this study, although two of the participating students had an extremely difficult experience with their academic advisors, most of them were satisfied with the academic advising process.

With respect to student-faculty relationships, most of the participating students were disappointed that their relationship with classroom faculty did not enable them to become fully integrated into the college environment. In fact, in their stories about student-faculty interactions, participating students were disappointed in the quality of their relationships with classroom faculty. For example, finding a faculty member who was concerned about their personal and educational development was a difficult experience for most African-American students.

In their search for faculty with whom they could connect, many African-American students pursued black faculty who can engage them in the educational process and inspire them to academic success. However, they were concerned that

black faculty appeared to be the only individuals willing to serve as mentors, role models, and even skilled listeners for African-American students. This perception helped to perpetuate segregated communities where African-American students are denied full integration into the academic community of the college environment.

### Peer Interaction: Black and White Students

In this study, students were asked to share experiences that characterized their social interactions with white students (Question #7 & #8). In responding to this area of concern, Elizabeth discussed how difficult it has been for her to socialize at parties given by her white friends because of all the drinking.

Sometimes I go to parties given by white students. I usually go with my suitemates. I always get invited to these parties 'cause many of the white students in my suite and my classes are friendly toward me. They sort of feel like we have a bond. But I don't feel comfortable around a lot of white people. And, I really don't like to attend white frat parties. I know what to expect. So I don't have any interest in them. At white parties, there is a lot of drinking. I mean, white kids always have a lot of alcohol at their parties, all the alcohol you can imagine. And they don't do a lot of dancing either. They just stand around talking, drinking, and getting into all kinds of things I'm not interested in. Sometimes I really feel uncomfortable being there 'cause some white students can get really wild and crazy after a few drinks. Sometimes I'll have a drink. But I never drink to get myself drunk like they do. In my opinion, "How can you really socialize if you're dead drunk?" If I go to a white party, I'm sociable, but I'm always on my toes. And that's just because of my experiences. I sometimes see other black students there too. But I'm never going to put myself in a vulnerable situation whether I go to parties given by white students or other blacks.

Henrietta also had an extremely difficult time adjusting to the social interactions occurring at racially mixed parties because of the amount of drinking at such events. Henrietta's experiences with drinking on campus are reflected in her comments on the perceived differences between black students and white students partying.



When I first enrolled at UMass Dartmouth, I remember I had mixed feelings 'cause I was only 17. I wasn't really ready for college life at a big university. In fact, I was feeling sort of like the way I did when I first came to the United States, totally lost. Coming from a community college to a university was really a culture shock. It was scary, but at the same time, it was a new challenge. My first week on campus, I met a lot of new people and I met people who assured me that it would be a nice experience. But the language seemed different. There was also a big difference in the ways students interacted socially, particularly black and white students. It was like a different world. I experienced a lot of adjustments during my first week on campus that I was never exposed to in Ethiopia or in community college. I mean, in Ethiopia I never experienced racism, or saw students using drugs, or saw so many students drinking like they do here. I was never used to that. At white parties, there's nothing but a lot of drinking going on. That just drives me crazy. That's why I don't go to them anymore. It seems that nobody wants to really socialize or just talk at parties. They only want to drink, get high. So for me, that was a very shocking experience and a sad commentary on American social values.

For Brittany, differences in the way black students and white students party is not a big issue. She fully understands that many white students are not into rap music, and suggest that this very may foster social segregation between black students and white students on campus.

I don't really understand why there is this great racial divide between black and white students on campus, especially when it comes to partying. At black parties and at white parties there are those who do nothing but drink. So they just hang out together. And then the smokers hang out together, 'cause usually that's what they have in common. But my thing is I can party with blacks and with whites. But that's not my main focus here on campus. I've noticed that a lot of the heavy party people hang out together. In either case, when I go to a party, I want to have fun doing things that I want to do. When I party with white students, I'm not really expecting them to be sensitive to the type of music I like to listen to. How can they when they are more into white culture and not black culture? They drink a lot at their parties 'cause that's what they're used to doing. And, black students dance a lot at their parties 'cause that's what they're used to doing. But I really don't understand what the problem is 'cause at times, both groups seem to self-segregate.

Ludovice has also seen differences in the ways in which African-American students and white students interact at parties. Although Ludovice sometimes feels uncomfortable, at social events sponsored by white clubs and organizations, occasionally she will attend such events, especially if she is pressured by her roommate and other close friends, many of whom are white.

Being around my own people, it's just more of a social experience. Don't get me wrong, we study and stuff like that. But hanging out and being able to interact with people from the same background and who you have so much in common with is extremely valuable. I mean, as black people we can relate to each other. To me, white people seem cliquish. Most of them stick together. But that doesn't bother me because I want to stick to my people too. I don't mind interacting with white people, but it's just different being around certain white people. There are a lot of white people at this university. But I don't have that much in common with many of them. I am more into my work and what I have to do in school. I'm not going to go with them to rock and roll parties. I'm not searching for any type of social awareness or cultural enrichment.

I've gone to parties given by white students. It was interesting. They played regular music. You know, rock and roll and country music. But it was a different kind of experience. A lot of them just stand around drinking. I mean, they're so into drinking. Black students drink to be social and stuff like that. But it seems that white students drink just to get all drunk and everything. It was a different environment. But it wasn't bad, just different. I didn't really feel that I fit in at all.

When I go to white parties, I didn't dance because of the mood I was in and because there was a whole bunch of white people there. I was just not in that mood to dance. Now if they put some raga on, I don't know. I love raga. That's what I mean: if they had put some raga on I probably would have danced and had a good time. But they don't play raga. When I go to a party with all black people, I always feel comfortable, you know. I guess they have a different kind of fun, I don't know. It's different because they're black people. But, I really enjoy Hip-Hop parties. When I go to white parties, I'm always conscious about the differences in the way black students party and the way white students party. Unfortunately, sometimes I believe that the differences in how black students and white students party or socialize often keeps us socially segregated.



Although it is practically impossible for African-American students to remain in a predominantly white college environment without socially interacting with white students, interracial dating is often discouraged among black students. Yet the issue of interracial dating was one that Wanda was very interested in discussing. Speaking from her own personal experiences, Wanda was very candid about interracial friendships and interracial dating on campus. There was anger and confusion in Wanda's voice as she talked about how whites and other blacks perceived dark skinned African-Americans.

I've actually dated a white guy before. I can't really knock black-white relationships. You really can't until you try it. I must admit, however, that I prefer black men instead of white men. More importantly, I prefer a dark-skinned black man because I find them more beautiful and more pleasant to look at. I prefer dark skinned black men because I know what it's like to be discriminated against by whites and for that matter by other black people because of the color of your skin. I'm dark-skinned, but, I still prefer black men. But, getting back to this interracial dating thing, although I don't have a problem with it, I don't want my boy friend secretly dating some white girl. I see enough of that on this campus already.

But you know, a lot of my girlfriends who are black would never dream of having a serious relationship with a white guy. And even though a number of black guys date white women, a lot of the black women on campus sometimes have a real problem with interracial dating. But I don't care -- whatever floats your boat.

But like I said, I really prefer black men. My only problem though is that for some reason, it seems that some black men on this campus have the mentality that getting girls, hanging out, and not going to class is more of a priority. I also find it hard for black men to be as open and honest with me as I am with them. Sometimes when I date black men, I often felt that I'm giving more to the relationship. But in any case, I still find black men more attractive than white men.

Mildred has learned to accept interracial dating as a fact of life, particularly within the Cape Verdean culture. She recognizes the differences between African-Americans and Cape Verdean-Americans, with respect to racial identity development,

and the fact that many Cape Verdeans consider themselves to be biracial. However, because of encounters with racism, discrimination, and cultural prejudice, Mildred has a very difficult time accepting interracial dating as an option for herself.

White people are not as quick to pass judgement as black people are. And black females are the worst. With black women, they don't just judge you on academic merits. They judge you on how you look, where you're from, your background, who you're dating, and stuff like that. It's terrible. That's why I would never date a white guy. I don't have anything against interracial dating. But I would never do it personally. I know a lot of people who have done it, and I have nothing against it. I know there are a lot of Cape Verdeans on campus and many of them have parents or grandparents who are white. So they may not have a problem dating a white person or even marrying a white person. But that's not me. I just feel like, there's just too many differences between black people and white people. I know a lot of White guys who are cool. But then, with a lot of white guys, I find that we have nothing in common. The things they like to do. The music they like to listen to. The things they eat. Everything is so different. I don't think I could ever get into a serious relationship with a white man. I don't think I can take the stares and the criticism that often come with interracial dating. Besides, with all the racial prejudice and discrimination black people have experienced in past years, I just couldn't bring myself to date a white guy. Maybe that's my own prejudice coming out. But I have too many memories of the way things used to be in this country for black people. Besides, my mother would never let me forget the racial prejudice they've gone through either.

### Summary Analysis: Interactions Between Black and White Students

According to the literature, one of the most important expectations in a collegiate environment is the ability of students to socially interact with individuals of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds (Stage & Hamrick, 1994). At UMass Dartmouth, social interaction between black students and white students is unavoidable. Unfortunately, while most of the African-American students who participated in this study expressed an understanding of the importance of interacting with students of diverse racial and cultural background, they often feel uncomfortable being the only



black students at parties, concerts, and other social events given by white students.

They also expressed concerns about engaging in interracial dating. For many African-American students, attending white parties and engaging in interracial dating are two of the more complex and difficult social experiences that lead to racial harassment and cultural prejudice. It should be noted, however, that these negative behaviors came not only from white students but from other black students as well.

Finally, most participating students understood that self-segregation has a negative impact on their ability to become fully integrated into the campus environment. Yet some of them almost preferred self-segregation rather than be subjected to racial prejudice or harassment often experienced by black students in a predominantly white environment.

#### Peer Interactions: African-American Students

In this study, students were asked to describe their social interactions with other black students on campus, and to reflect on the meaning of that experience (Questions #5 & #6). In responding to these questions, Elizabeth explains that for most of her childhood, she grew up in predominantly white neighborhood where she had friends from almost every racial, cultural, and ethnic background. Therefore, her limited experience with black culture has made it difficult for her to fully understand other African-American students on campus or to become involved in social and cultural activities designed solely for students of color.

Here on campus, I sometimes have a problem with understanding other black students. I mean, sometimes the African-American students don't realize that I am also black. Maybe I'm not dark enough. Anyway, I tend to stay away from them even though a few of them are in my art classes. I

just can't identify with them. It's funny I grew up in a white neighbourhood and I've always had a black experience. But I really don't understand African-American culture. I don't know why. But it's totally different from what I'm used to. In any case, I continue to be somewhat involved in both the Cape Verdean Student Association and the United Brothers and Sisters. I believe that blacks should stick together as much as possible. There are so few of us on campus. And for us to be successful both academically and socially, we must stick together as a people.

To survive on campus, Yvette has come to depend on such cultural support programs as the Unity House. According to Yvette, "these programs provide students of color with the racial, ethnic, and cultural support they need to persist in a predominantly white college environment." Unfortunately, Yvette believes that the disunity these organizations sometimes cause is the result of various cliques that are so prevalent among Cape Verdean and African-American students. She says,

When I came to this university, I wanted so much to join the Cape Verdean Student Association. But I wasn't impressed with the leadership of that organization. I think to hold an office you have to speak the language and since I'm second or third generation Cape Verdean, I wasn't qualified to hold office. When I found this out I was so disappointed, and I was really angry too. There is a lot of cultural discrimination among students of color at the university. A lot of the girls in particular have personal issues and you know it's all about color, your hair texture, and so forth. I can't get involved in that stuff. I try to integrate as much as I can. I have friends who are racially and culturally different. And I think that's nice because I sit with them in the cafeteria or I make plans to meet with friends outside of class. I really try to do my part to change racial attitudes and perceptions among both black students and white students on campus. I don't know what other way to go about it. But sometimes, students of color can be so cliquish that it's almost impossible to break the cultural barriers that exist between them.

The social cliques that are the foundation of so many affinity groups on campus are also evident to Henrietta, who feels that such organizations encourage cultural prejudice among students of color. According to Henrietta:

I really think that its important to have organizations such as the Cape Verdean Student Association and the United Brothers and Sisters (UBS).



Unfortunately, within these organizations, I see a lot of high school mentality and cliques. You can walk into the commuter cafeteria and you see all the gay people at one table and all the football players at another table. And, it's really not hard to single out the Cape Verdeans and the black students also sitting at separate tables. It's really discouraging and I don't really understand why it happened. We're supposed to be in college. We should be more educated about these things. We should be more open-minded, but there are still a lot of people who are culturally ignorant and who are afraid to socialize with other groups whether it's another athletic group or students of color. I mean they are just afraid and they don't know how to approach people who are different. For me, there are just too many cliques out there, especially among students of color. And that makes it difficult for us to interact with one another. We can never unite as a people because of our cultural differences and our perceptions of racial identity. That's what bothers me about this campus and many of the black students here.

Being older and more mature, Wayne also realizes that the various social and ethnic cliques among students of color on campus creates disunity.

My social adjustment to the university has been rather rough. I still don't think that I fit in. I'm a little bit older than most students and I'm seriously focused on getting my degree. Although there are not many minorities on campus, I still don't feel like I get along well with most of them. I think there're very cliquish on campus. I feel that minority students like to be in each other's business a little too much. As I think back on my experiences at other colleges, I don't think things were like the way they are here. At times, I find it rather difficult to swallow. People always wanting to know what you are doing or just to get into your business. They take a little bit of information and twist it into something it's not. I found that difficult to handle and I still do, but I'm learning how to cope with it; you know, I'm trying to handle it. Basically I'm trying to focus more on my schooling than my social life. But, I know there are some good people on campus. I know who they are and they know who I am. So you know, hopefully we will get together in the future and we can tackle things together.

For Robert, the formation of cultural cliques within black affinity group, makes it extremely difficult for him and other students of color to interact personally, socially, or academically. More importantly, he believes that the desired racial and cultural understanding that is expected of students in a collegiate environment will never fully

develop because of the cultural prejudice resulting from cultural cliques within the black community. According to Robert,

I really don't know if racism is the right word or maybe it is just cultural prejudice, but I sometimes hear very negative and derogatory comments made by Cape Verdean students. They often make negative and derogatory comments about Haitians. They would say things like "Don't you think Haitians look scary?" And then, some of the African-Americans would make derogatory comments about the Cape Verdeans. And, then I would hear the Haitians talk about the Cape Verdeans and the African-Americans. I mean, everybody talks about everybody. But the Asians seem to stay within their own group. The Haitians, the Cape Verdeans, and the African-Americans, they all seem to mix and mingle amongst each other. But the Asians, they really segregate themselves from every other student of color group.

Coming to New England from the Southwest, Della had never heard of Cape Verdean Americans. She was always taught to believe that "black people are black people no matter where they come from." However, in reflecting on her interactions with Cape Verdeans and other students of color, Della says:

Coming to a predominantly white campus in New England, I just automatically assumed that the black students on campus would embrace each other much better than they do. But they all have their own little groups. While some are willing to open up, others are not so willing to accept you as part of their group or into their little community. When I first learned that certain groups of black students stick together, I thought that was rather odd. I'm really a friendly person and I'm a lot more experienced socially than most students. But I keep to myself. When I first arrived on campus, I used to hold black people in really high esteem. But since I've been here, I seem to always get disappointed, especially with the students of color because they all seem to be so cliquish and at times anti-social.

Because she is Jamaican, Wanda tends to identify with and socialize more with students from Ethiopia and other African countries. In doing so, she too has experienced firsthand the cultural prejudice and discrimination shared by African-American students on campus.



Although Cape Verdeans are rich in family pride and cultural traditions, some of them have a lot of personal issues. A lot of the girls in particular are very jealous. There is a lot of jealousy among the women. And you know it's all about skin color, hair texture, who can speak the language, and so forth. It's really narrow minded stuff. But I'm older, and I really can't get involved in that. I really don't know what their problem is.

I've talked with a number of the Cape Verdean girls on campus. Many of them come from families that seem to be more concerned with skin color and hair texture than anything else. I mean, these issues have been in their families for years. And I find that their parents have some strange ideas of what you are supposed to look like, racially, culturally, you know. Because of their identity issues, I think that a lot of Cape Verdeans are really insecure. They are not confident in knowing that it really should not matter how you look on the outside. What matters is what's inside. I know that there are cultural differences between Cape Verdeans, African Americans, and even Jamaicans. Unfortunately, it's the differences that keep us confused and divide us as a community here on campus.

Wanda believes that the cliques that exist among African-American and Cape Verdean students impede social interactions and group solidarity.

The cliques here on campus are really different. Maybe its just something that happens only among black people in New England. I don't know. But, I've talked with so many of my friends from California and from other parts of the country, and they say that there dosen't seem to be a big difference in how black students relate to one another out there. There may be cliques out there but you wouldn't walk into a cafeteria, and see a group of black people here or a big group of white people over there. But on this campus, that seems to be the norm. I was told that, at one time, the African-American students and the Cape Verdean students here on campus tried to get together to form one organization called United Brothers and Sisters. Then the Cape Verdean students split off to form their own association. But I really don't think that there should be cliques or separate identity groups among students of color. I know a lot of Cape Verdean students would disagree with me simply because they have a lot of island pride and they feel that they are different. I've been told that a lot of Cape Verdeans, whether first or second generation, believe that they are not black or African-American. Instead, they identify racially as white or Portuguese. They feel that they're different. So some of them would probably be offended if they could not form their own identity group. I think that racial or cultural identity is a personal issue. But I still don't agree with black students who segregate from other students of color just because of cultural differences. That kind of behavior threatens solidarity.

And that's not good for them. And, it's not good for any of us as a black community

### Summary Analysis: Peer Interactions Among African-American Students

From the personal characteristics that describe the students who participated in this study, it is evident that they are greatly diverse with respect to racial, cultural, and ethnic identity development. Although each of them identified as African-American, many of them expressed pride in their biracial background and the influence of their multicultural heritage on their self-awareness. Yet being "older," "more experienced socially," and "seriously committed" to achieving their educational and career goals, these students do not seem to be preoccupied with issues of racial identity or skin color. However, they do appear to be sensitive to the fact that they are learning and, in some cases, living in a collegiate environment where issues of race, racial identity, and skin color determine social interactions among students of color.

From a historical perspective, these issues are not new to UMass Dartmouth or to many of the students of color who matriculate from the urban communities of Southeastern Massachusetts. According to Readon (1981), within these communities, issues of racial identification and skin color have always influenced social interactions among Cape Verdeans and African American peoples in this region of the State. In fact, many of them believe that racial identification and skin color are critical factors that determine social mobility, economic security, educational development, and place of residence (Readon, 1981).

In reading the stories of the students in this study, it is quite clear that issues of racial identity and skin color continue to influence social interactions among students of



color at the university. In fact, personal and interpersonal issues involving “skin color,” “facial feature,” and “hair texture” have made it difficult for many of them to develop friendships or even to associate with some members of the black community at UMass Dartmouth. These issues have also made it difficult for some students to cope with battered identities, conflicting cultural ideals, and family expectations about race and racial identification.

In discussing the influence of race on their social interactions within the black community, several participating students made the following comments: “Sometimes the African-American students don’t realize that I’m also black. Maybe I’m not dark enough. Anyway, I tend to stay away from them...” - Elizabeth

“They all seem to have their own little social group...to be cliquish and at times anti-social.” - Della

“For me, there are just too many cliques out there, especially among students of color. And that makes it difficult for us to interact with one another. That’s what bothers me about this campus.” – Henrietta

Knowing that there are racial and cultural differences that impede the development of interpersonal relations among students of color, Wanda says, “I know that there are cultural differences between Cape Verdeans, African Americans, and even Jamaicans. Unfortunately, it’s the differences that keep us confused and divide us as a community here on campus.”

### Peer Interactions: Within the Residence Halls

In this study, residential students were asked to discuss social adjustment issues they experienced as a result of living on campus (Question #13). Their response to this area of concern revealed a number of issues and concerns typically experienced by African-American students on a predominantly white college campus. For example, for Crystal, the challenge of living with a white roommate who frequently made racial slurs and inappropriate generalizations about the intellectual ability of African-Americans created a hostile living environment. Unable to cope with her roommate's racial hostility and prejudice, Crystal met with administrative staff in the Office of Housing and Residential Life. Her intent was to discuss strategies that could help resolve conflicts between her and her roommate. In her narrative, Crystal talked about the frustration she felt and the difficulties she experienced in her efforts to deal with what she perceived to be a hostile living environment.

When I first moved on campus, I had this roommate. Her name was Karen. She was so racist and at times very hostile toward black students. She would say things like, "all black people are monkeys." Just to be funny. Needless to say, we got into a lot of confrontations. She was messy. And she would have her boyfriend over constantly which made me feel like I had a triple instead of a double. Sometimes, she even had him spend the weekend, which made me really uncomfortable, 'cause I know this guy. It was almost like I was sharing a room with him instead of Karen. He was always eating my food. And I would always tell him, "you can't just go around eating someone's food, what's wrong with you?"

Well, at first I thought Karen was fine. But I had no clue just how prejudiced she was. I took her out with me one day. I always tried to be her friend. But one day, I went to the cafeteria with her and we were sitting with a whole bunch of her friends. Finally, some of my black friends saw me and asked me to come sit with them. So I asked Karen to go with me, and she agreed. She was the only white person sitting at the table with us. At one point, all of us were just joking around, like we always do. And Karen started joking around with us, too. Then all of a



sudden she said, “all black people are just monkeys!” Everybody just sat there and I was like, “What did she say?” At first, we all tried to ignore her. Then I said, “Oh, she didn’t mean anything. She doesn’t know what she’s saying.” She later told me that I made her feel like she was a racist by saying that ‘cause she has black friends. And she makes those kind of comments all the time around them, and they’re ok with it.

After she made what obviously was a racist comment, she then said, “Oh, I was just joking.” But nobody took it as a joke. There are certain things that are just not acceptable, I’m sorry. I don’t think so. They just aren’t. Later that day, Karen called her mother and told her what I had said. One of her friends, a student of color, also came by the room to talk with her about the situation. But then, later that week, I heard Karen on the phone telling somebody, “look, I’m tired of living with this nigger!” Of course, I knew she was talking about me. I wanted to smack her so badly.

Before I came to UMass Dartmouth, I was living on my own. So you can just guess that living with a bunch of young white girls in a dorm room makes me feel like a mother hen. I’ve always felt very uncomfortable being around other women, particularly white women. You just don’t know what they are capable of doing. I seriously think that older students should be placed in a dorm area with other students their own age.

I eventually ended up moving to a single, which was the best thing that ever happened to me. I don’t think anyone should be stuck with a roommate they don’t like.

Within the first few hours after moving on campus, Robert experienced what he perceived to be racism at the hands of his roommate. At that brief point in his college career, the anger, hostility, and resentment Robert once felt for white people while growing up in Boston resurfaced. Robert describes his roommate Calvin, and their first encounter in the dormitory:

When I first arrived on campus, I walked into my room and saw that my roommate had already moved in. I didn’t know who he was. But because I’m African-American, I just automatically assumed that the Housing Office would assign me with another black person. Well, anyway, I was putting my stuff away, when this white guy came bursting into the room and immediately started yelling at me and accusing me of breaking into the room and trying to steal his stereo and stuff. At that point, he had no idea that I was his roommate. He had no idea that Housing would have assigned him a black roommate. Well he eventually apologized. But I still

think he's racist and a bigot 'cause of comments he's always making about blacks and Hispanics.

One day, I almost punched him out. Now that we've been living together for a while, Calvin and I have become good friends. But even though I live with him, I still don't think I can really trust him, especially when he gets around some of his white friends 'cause he's always making funny little comments about black people. He's still a bigot and at times, he has no sensitivity to what black people go through every day just to survive.

On another occasion, I was leaving my dorm room. As I walked out the door, I heard loud music coming from the room next door. It was really some disgusting, hard rock music. I don't like hard rock music anyway. As I started to leave, my roommate Calvin says to me that he's tired of listening to that music. So he yelled out, "turn that music down." The guy who was playing the music came out of his room and said, "What? What you say?" And my roommate said, "You know, turn down the music, it's too loud." The guy who was playing the music asked, "why?" So Calvin said, "cause nobody wants to hear that stuff." The guy then says to me, "Who don't want to hear it?" Now I never said anything about the music. Anyway, I was on my way out the door. Calvin had already told this guy his name about 4 times, and, he mentioned my name only once. But the guy who was playing the music looked over at me and said, "Oh, you don't want to hear my music?" I was like hey, "I'm on my way out. I don't care what you do." And, he asked, "What do you want to hear? "You want to hear some nigger rap band? What's your nickname, sleep doggie dog or something like that?" I tried to ignore him and I went on about my business. But what's so funny is that all this happened my first day on campus.

Calvin and I eventually moved from that suite about two weeks later because I almost got into an argument with that same guy. It came close to a fistfight 'cause every time I'd see him, he would start telling jokes about black people having smaller brains and stuff like that. You know, just repeating all the stereotypes he had ever read or heard about black people. From what I hear, incidents like the ones I experienced my first day on campus happen to other black students almost every day in the dorms.



During her interview, Sherron discussed how cultural differences, particularly those related to the type of music appreciated, valued, and listen to by African-American students, can become a source of conflict and racial tension.

I almost killed my roommate last semester. I almost killed her, really, I did. Of course she's white. And of course, she has these issues with black people, you know. I like rap, calypso, and raga. But whenever I would be listening to my music, she would say to me, "I don't like that music, turn it off." I would say, "absolutely not. I'm not turning off my music because that's what you want me to do." We almost got into a fight and I was just like, I can't do it. I've just got to get out of here. We later talked. But I could still tell that she had no respect for me as far as my music was concerned. But I didn't care. I played my music anyway. I mean I didn't try to offend her in any way, but I still play my music whenever I want. Besides, I never complain about the kind of music she listens too.

In adjusting to residential living, Wanda got a quick lesson in American social values when she had to confront her own homophobia and the cultural prejudice and racist attitudes of her roommate. After several weeks of living in a very painful, stressful suite environment, it became evident to Wanda that her roommate's racial identity and sexual orientation were issues of discontent, causing a great deal of stress for both of them. Unable to resolve their differences, both Wanda and her roommate decided that it would be best for them to ask for a different room assignment.

When I first came to UMass Dartmouth, I went through so many changes, both socially and culturally. Some of these changes I've never experienced in Ethiopia. One of them was the fact that my roommate was of a different sexual orientation. I mean, I had this roommate who was gay or a lesbian. I didn't know why, but I had never met a lesbian before. At least I don't think so. I'm not saying that my country doesn't have lesbians or anything like that. But I've never heard of it. So, it was hard for me to accept someone who had different sexual preferences. When I found out that my roommate was a lesbian, that was really a shock. She seemed to be the nicest person. And, in many respects, she still is. We got along really well. And we were always together, going to football games and stuff, 'cause I love sports, particularly football. We even had several classes together.

I later found out that she sort of liked me. You know, in a girlfriend sort of way. When I found that out, I was so angry. Of course I was concerned with what other people would say too. Would they think that I was a lesbian just because I had a gay roommate? Well, anyway, when I tried to talk with her about the situation, that's when things got really bad between us. I mean, she really began to show a racist side of her that I had never seen before. She would sometimes make racial comments that were really offensive. We didn't get into a fight or anything like that. Then our relationship got really ugly. Day after day we hardly spoke. I just had to get out of that roommate situation. But now that I think about it, I really think she reacted to me more out of anger than racism 'cause before she told me how she felt, she was really a nice person. I seriously think she let her emotions and our differences stand in the way of our friendship. I often wonder how she would have reacted to me if I was white.

Elizabeth recounts several experiences that impeded her ability to develop a positive and healthy relationship with her roommate. The most difficult was the feeling that they had lost respect and trust for each other. Elizabeth reflects on the conflicts between her and her roommate.

Even before my roommate and I really got to know each other she hated me. I guess someone had told her that I was saying things behind her back. Of course, that simply was not true. I admit, there were times when she was getting on my nerves. But I am not the kind of person who's going to play games or be dishonest. If I don't like you, I just don't like you. But unfortunately, I can't say the same about my roommate, Cynthia.

Our problems really started over food. I mean, when we first got together, we had agreed to share everything. I bought the refrigerator and she bought a microwave oven. We also agreed that I would buy groceries one week and she'd buy them the next. We would alternate, you know. I'm not into junk food. And I can't drink soda because of my ulcers. I usually buy meats and rice and food like that. She'd buy a couple of those things but mostly chips and soda. Anyway, she was always eating my food. And when all my food was gone, I didn't have anything to eat. She knew that I wouldn't eat hers 'cause I don't like junk food. So after a while I told her, "You know what, I'm spending too much money on food. I'm not your mother. I can't continue to support you. You need to buy your own things." Then to make matters worse, one day she decided to make dinner, thinking she would be helpful just because I was in class all day. Anyway, when I came back to the room, she had cooked dinner. But she still used my food. So again, we had a problem.



Then she started lying and telling her white friends that I was eating her stuff, which wasn't true, and that I was going through her personal stuff. In fact, she was the one who was going through my things. For example, one weekend, I went home as I do nearly every weekend. When I got back to the room, I found out that her brother had slept in my bed. And that her boyfriend had spent the night, too.

There was also a time when I came home and saw two of my towels over on her side of the room. I asked her why my towels were there, towels which, by the way, were inside my drawers. Obviously, that means that she had to go through all my things just to get my towels. She told me that all her towels were dirty. So she used mine because she didn't have anything for her boyfriend to dry off with that night. I told her that she would have to wash them before giving them back. But at that point, I couldn't trust her. I couldn't trust leaving the room without feeling that I would be personally violated, that my personal things would be stolen, used, or moved without my permission.

#### Summary Analysis: Peer Interactions Within the Residence Halls

Evidence suggests that the social and psychological context created by on-campus living enhances social integration, particularly among students from diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In keeping with this perspective, the Admissions Office and the Office of Housing and Residential Life, at UMass Dartmouth, promote on-campus residential living as an ideal community where the interactions among students enhance not only academic and social integration, but also the development of mature interpersonal relationships.

Unfortunately, for Crystal, Robert, Sherron, Henrietta, and Elizabeth, it was almost impossible for them to develop a mature interpersonal relationship or interactions with their roommates. From their narratives, it is evident that the quality of their interactions created a great deal of stress and anxiety, forcing them to seek alternative living arrangements, and in some cases a new roommate. Thus, for these

students, social integration as described in the university housing and admissions publications and as identified in the literature did not fully develop.

In fact, Crystal, Robert, Sherron, Wanda, and Elizabeth identified a number of challenges that characterized their social interactions with their roommates. Included among these challenges were issues of racism, homophobia, self-integrity, and value differences. For some students, these issues impeded their ability to feel personally connected to their roommates and socially integrated into the campus environment. These issues were reflected in such comments as: “I couldn’t trust her.” “She plays games and is dishonest.” “She often makes racial comments.” “He has no sensitivity to what black people go through every day just to survive.” “She had no respect for me.” “He’s a racist and a bigot.”

Although Crystal, Robert, Sherron, Wanda, and Elizabeth were highly offended by the hostility and racial prejudice directed towards them by their roommates, and at times by other white students, they never engaged in any physical altercation. However, thoughts of exerting physical violence as a way to deal with such incidents were not far from their minds. For example, the following assertions, taken from the narratives of Crystal, Robert, Sherron, Wanda, and Elizabeth clearly illustrate their anger and frustration: “I was so angry.” “I tried to ignore him.” “Then, our relationship got really ugly.” “I wanted to smack her so badly.” “I almost punched him out.” “I almost killed my roommate.” “I really don’t think anyone should be stuck with a roommate they don’t like.”

These comments were made in response to students’ perceptions of racism and cultural prejudice, and they reflect a number of other developmental challenges



common among first-year students living in a residential environment. Among these challenges are issues involving students' inability to: a) be civil in expressing and managing their feelings; b) respect personal belongings and cultural differences; c) rethink first impressions; d) trust one another; e) make meaningful commitments; and f) communicate as responsible adults.

### Coping with Difficult Social Adjustment Issues

Many of the African-American students in this study experienced racial discrimination, cultural prejudice, and the deleterious social consequences of racial stereotyping in their attempts to transition into the university community. In fact, in their stories, students spoke of how these experiences were evident not only in the classroom, but in the residence halls and at various social activities sponsored by white students.

To survive the emotional and psychological difficulties in what Crystal characterizes as a "racially stressful environment," participating African American students developed a variety of personal and collective strategies. These strategies include: a) oppositional behaviors which defy conformity to normal expectations in a collegiate environment; b) self-segregation or separating themselves from the dominate population; and c) an attempt to independently establish meaningful social activities that meet their personal needs.

Students were asked to discuss the strategies they employed to successfully cope with racial discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and other difficult social adjustment issues (Question #16). Their responses have been categorized as oppositional behavior,

self-segregation, and black separatism. For example, in his interview, Raymond expressed his reluctance to reveal to his professors his weaknesses in writing research papers. So instead of seeking help from his faculty, Raymond's oppositional behavior or coping strategies manifested themselves in his seeking out other African-American students who were sensitive to his academic needs and willing to assist him with required writing assignments.

I get along very well with most of my faculty advisors, and I don't think I have any troubles with any professors either. However, there is sort of a Catch 22. I mean, sometimes when I'm in class and I don't understand something but I want somebody to explain something, well, I don't go to my professor. At least, not all the time especially if I want to get an "A." To me, it seems that as soon as you expose yourself and you tell your professors that you don't understand something, then they stereotype you in a certain way, and I don't want any professor to lock me into "a B student category." If early in the course you admit to your professor that you are weak in a particular area, like writing papers, then they'll definitely stereotype you or see you in a different light. Even if I don't understand a class assignment, I'm going to go home at night and work hard studying what I need to know.

From his story, it is evident that Raymond's oppositional behavior was contrary to the normal expectations required in a student-faculty relationship. Nevertheless, the strategies he employed enabled him to experience academic and personal success.

Della also employs oppositional behavior in her In reflecting on the strategies she employs to cope with perceptions of campus racism. Della says,

Other than the white people I live with, I really don't interact with that many white students, well, maybe a couple of people in my economics class. But I couldn't say that I really have any social interaction with them. I thought about that actually just today and I thought like, Wow! It's not that I'm going out of my way to be a snob to white people. I don't know why, but I'm just not overly friendly to them. In most of my classes I'm the only black student. I find that if white students don't already know you then they really don't want to know you. To be honest with you, I don't even think about making friends with white people. I guess I've always been that way all my life. If I don't know you, I'm not going



to run up and pretend that I like you whether you're black or white. So it doesn't bother me that white students don't approach me or interact with me that much. But then again, like I said earlier, I'm not really worried about that 'cause that's not why I'm here. Then too, the way the black students, I mean the ones I interact with, the way they're always talking about white students and describing some of the things that have happened to them at white parties and social events, makes me want to just keep to myself. It's not that I have any dealings with a lot of white students anyway. But I just feel that the African-American students are feeling very discriminated against. Well, I don't know if discrimination is really the right word to use. But it just seems that the black students aren't involved in a whole lot on campus. But like everything white people do is Okay! But if black folks do it, there's a problem. It just seems that there's always something wrong with what the black student do and how they do it. So I pretty much don't interact with white students that much unless, I have to.

Yvette cannot recall a time at UMass Dartmouth where she has actually experienced racism. However, she has experienced psychological stress associated with not belonging to a particular cultural affinity group (i.e., Cape Verdean Student Association or Black Student Union). Yvette's strategy for coping in a climate of racial and cultural prejudice is simply to get involved and to encourage interpersonal interactions between students regardless of their differences. Her strategy for coping in such an environment is in complete opposition to the attitudes of some students of color who believe in self-segregation.

I have never personally experienced racism here at UMass Dartmouth. I think that because of my complexion, my hair, I pretty much feel accepted no matter who I am with. There are times, however, when I'm around white people and they will say things about blacks, not realizing that "hello, I'm black too!" That's why I try to let it be known right away that I am biracial so that my white friends don't make the mistake of saying something that may offend me. I think I have a good relationship with my classmates whether they are black, white, or whatever. I'm a people person. I have a good personality, and people seem to like me. I'm very encouraging when I'm with other students, especially minority students and those who are single moms like myself. We kind of support one another. Sometimes we do our work together and talk about what's happening on campus. But I don't see that much interaction between

black students and white students on campus. I'm not necessarily saying that just because black students and white students don't interact that it's a racial thing. But if we're supposed to be in a diverse school, why isn't everyone interacting and doing social things together? But it all starts at the top. Administration has got to be concerned with the racial dynamics on campus and do something about it. I suggest that the university encourage every student to simply to get involved in the social life of the campus thereby forcing individuals of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds to interact with one another.

But like I said before, I don't have a lot of time to socialize, and I don't go to a lot of social activities by black students either. I don't know. Maybe it's because some of the minority students on campus are not very friendly towards me. I go out of my way sometimes just to say hi. But it's gotten to the point where I'm not doing that any more. You're not better than me. And I don't care if I'm not dark enough for them. In my opinion, there aren't that many of us on campus. So why can't we just stick together? I just don't understand it. Being biracial, sometimes I think of myself as Cape Verdean and sometimes I'm African-American. I choose not to neglect either side of my heritage because it's important to me. I know who I am. I know who my parents are. I sometimes feel that I'm not black enough for some of the African-American students. I'm not Cape Verdean enough for the Cape Verdean students. And I'm definitely not white enough for the white students. But I don't care. Although, sometimes I find that the black students do make me question who I am, you know, my identity. I'm not saying that as a negative thing. But it's kind of sad when I have to question myself and ask "who's going to accept me? Where do I fit in? or How do the black students see me?" I want to interact with everyone, both blacks and whites. I'm comfortable in both worlds. I really like this school. But right now, with many students of color, it's just a hi and bye situation. I'm too old to be worried about who's black and who's white, or who's racist, you know. I just want to finish school and get my degree, and support my family. That's what keeps me going.

Another strategy employed by African-American students in their efforts to survive in a racially stressful and predominantly white college environment is self-segregation. According to Tatum (1997), on predominantly white college campuses across the country, self-segregation is a way of life for many African-American students. It is clearly visible in the dining area where students of diverse racial and cultural background or affinity groups gather to socialize with those with whom they



have the most in common. Many of these students value and embrace self-segregation as an important coping strategy because it provides them with the opportunity to socialize with members of their particular racial or cultural group in a relaxed and informal setting. In support of their argument for self-segregation, the literature suggests that for students of color, this coping strategy provides “security and racial identity, a sense of solidarity and the empowerment derived from common interests and collective goals” (Fisher & Hartman, 1995, p. 125).

Unfortunately, although sitting in the cafeteria with one’s own racial or cultural identity group has its benefits, the perception that black students are socially segregated from the dominant white population can be a source of discontent in the development of social relationships between blacks and whites. It is also perceived as being in conflict with the university’s efforts to create an integrated learning environment that ensures diversity in all aspects of campus life. Yet many of the African-American students interviewed felt that at times, self-segregation is a necessary strategy to survive in a hostile environment that denies them full membership in the university community. For example, Wanda discussed her belief in the importance of self-segregation because of the social and psychological support she gains from such an experience. According to Wanda,

A lot of people have a problem with black students sitting at separate tables in the cafeteria. But I think that black students sitting with their own racial or cultural group is important because it helps them to feel more comfortable socially and psychologically. So they gravitate to those tables. Anyway, if you were to walk through the cafeteria, you would automatically see the football students over here, the art students over there, and even the Asian-American students up there. So why can’t the black students sit at particular table by themselves? I’m not saying that they can’t. They can and they do. I don’t know why, but even when we do just sit together, some white people get suspicious. Yet, a lot of black

students that I know wouldn't even go over to a white table to see what they have in common with white students. They automatically assume that they would have more in common with someone just because they share the same color skin.

But I socialize with everyone. In fact, I've been approached by a lot of black students who would say to me, "Wanda, why do you have so many white friends?" It's not that I have a lot of white friends. I'd explain to them that I don't choose friends based on skin color. I have a lot in common with some white people. Actually, at orientation this past summer, I spent a lot of time with white students. And we had a good time together. Being black or being white was never an issue. That's how I see it now. And I'm not going to give up the friends I've made just to please other people of my race. At one time, I did have a lot of black friends. But almost weekly, at least one of them would say to me, "Wanda, why are you talking to all these white people?" I'm beyond that. And I realize how much more important other things are in life other than race. I just hope that one day we come to the point where people realize it's not all about black and white all the time. There are more important aspects that each of us as individuals must face.

While enrolled at Millersville University, Wayne's popularity as a star basketball player provided him with various social opportunities that were not afforded African-American students who were not involved in athletics. However, without basketball, Wayne now finds it is difficult to gain membership into certain social circles of white students at UMass Dartmouth. Because he is perceived as a regular student, Wayne now has to deal with the experience of feeling isolated and disconnected from mainstream campus life like most African-American students at the university.

I feel like there are a lot of racial issues confronting black students here on campus. I feel like there is a lot of tension in the air. I don't think I felt it this strong in Pennsylvania but I do feel it here. I feel that there's a complete separation here between black students and white students. In my opinion, there's really no communication between the two groups. Maybe I didn't feel it as much at my other school because I played basketball. I was a star and all that, and I was more readily accepted by white students there. They had a nickname for me and all that. But here, I'm just a regular student. Maybe I'm experiencing what other minority students who don't play sports experience. I don't know, they just treat you differently when you're not a star player. I just feel like they treat you



like you don't exist or something. They really don't want you here. I know that not all white people are like that. I don't know, I can't explain. Maybe it was like this when I was playing basketball at Millersville. But, I don't remember seeing it. It just feels that here at UMass, we're segregated by race. You can tell when you walk in the cafeteria in the campus center. A lot of blacks will sit in one area of the cafeteria and white students sit on the other side. It's like a complete separation. I don't really see anything wrong with it, but it just seems that some white students get intimidated when they see a lot of blacks socializing or sitting together. And I don't know why.

Several students, including Robert, have made a concerted effort to encourage African-American students to become more integrated socially and more involved in campus life, especially in the residential dining area. Although Robert is fully aware that the campus continues to be racially segregated, having a white student as a roommate has enabled him to become more sensitive to the cultural differences that exist between black and white students.

I really don't think that there is a whole lot of integration between the different races or between students of different cultural background, at least not in the cafeteria. There are a small number of minorities on campus and the ones who do seem to integrate well with white students tend to be the football players or the basketball players. And that's probably because they're all on the same team. It seems that white students only talk to you if you are on the basketball team, the football team, or the baseball team. If you're not an athlete, then they might not even talk to you, let alone sit at a table with you. And after you talk with them about sports, what else is there to talk about? In my opinion, that's why black students stay to themselves in the cafeteria. Where we sit, white students call it the "Black Hole." But I don't care what they call it. When I'm there I really have fun socializing with other students of color. We have our spot and they have theirs. I don't think that most black students feel welcomed on this campus. But whenever I can, I try to encourage my roommate and his friends to come over to the "Black Hole." Maybe if more white students hang out there, then they won't call it the "Black Hole" anymore.

A third strategy employed by African-American students in their efforts to survive in a predominantly white college environment is to develop or participate in

racial and cultural affinity groups that support their transition into the social and academic communities of the campus. Although “there are fewer black student support groups on the campuses of traditionally white colleges and universities than was the case 20 years ago,” racial and cultural affinity groups contribute immensely to enriching the social adjustment experience of African-American students (Cross, 1999, p. 51).

Even at UMass Dartmouth, cultural affinity groups, including the United Brothers and Sisters (UBS), the Cape Verdean Student Association, Sister to Sister, and the Douglass Unity House, are important to the survival and persistence of students of color. Additionally, these organizations make a concerted effort to provide African-American students with support, advocacy, and a sense of community necessary in creating their own social life.

According to some African-American students, creating their own social life on campus is necessary because of perceived differences in the ways in which blacks and white students socialize. Additionally, many African-American students feel that their own social activities, particularly Hip Hop parties, are more central to their social and cultural needs in a predominantly white college environment. Unfortunately, although the idea of a Hip-Hop party is strongly desired by many African-American students on campus, it has not always been welcomed by some members of the university community, including many of the white student organizations. According to Della,

When the black students try to have any type of social activity on campus, they are often criticized by the Student Senate. And anytime we even try to have a Hip-Hop party, the campus police are always there ready in seconds to have us dispersed.

During the 1999 fall semester, black students held a Hip-Hop Party held in the University Student Center. When a fight broke out between two female students, in an



isolated area of the Student Center, the entire crowd of 300 African-American students was showered with pepper spray by campus police. The official police report indicated that the use of pepper spray was an attempt to break up the fight and to settle what they thought would be an “uncontrollable situation.” However, immediately after discharging the pepper spray, the six white police officers who were stationed at the Hip-Hop party called for back-up because they “expected the crowd of mostly African-American students to react violently to the discharge.” Within minutes after placing the call for back-up, 40 police officers from the town of Westport and the Dartmouth State Police Barracks responded to the call. It was later learned that many of the off-campus police officers were unfamiliar with college students’ development and perhaps even the behavior of culturally diverse students at a hip hop party.

At the end of the night, only one student was arrested for disorderly conduct, assault, and battery. A second student, who was involved in the fight, was summonsed for arrest. The day after the Hip Hop incident, a student opinion survey was randomly administered to black and white, in an effort to explore their perceptions and experiences concerning the incident. The results of this survey revealed that most students were especially outraged when they learned of the sudden appearance of over 40 white police officers and the fact that none of the African-American students who was directly sprayed received immediate medical attention. Many of those who were surveyed also felt that race played an important part in the use of pepper spray.

Robert and Brittany attended the Hip-Hop party and were witness to the pepper spraying incident. Their sentiments summarize the feelings and concerns of those who completed the student opinion survey and of many others who perceived the use of

pepper spray as one attempt of campus police to interrupt social activities sponsored by students of color.

This incident was definitely race-related. They were hypersensitive to the issue because it was mostly people of color at the party and there were a bunch of white police officers involved in spraying the crowd. The whole incident could have been dealt with simply. If this was a party sponsored by white students and a fight broke out, you can bet that the police would not have pepper sprayed the entire crowd. And I don't care what anybody says, if the cops had guns, they probably would have shot someone too. – Brittany

Ya!, I feel like it's pretty hostile here on campus. Racism is out there. It's everywhere and it's going to happen to you no matter where you go. I can't think of a place anywhere on campus that black students don't encounter racism. I wasn't at the Hip-Hop party. But I heard that immediately after the incident there was a meeting between the black students and the administration. I don't know what's going to come of that meeting. But I feel that the pepper spray incident made matters worse between black students and the campus police. There seems to be a lot of racial hostility on this campus. So I don't know. But like I said, for right now, we'll just have to wait to see what's going to come of that meeting. But they don't really care. Not everyone is concerned enough about racial tension on campus. So I don't know what they will do about the pepper spraying incident. I don't think that you ever, really, really get used to the way white people treat you. For the most part, I expect racism from white people, especially in a social situation. But I don't think you ever get used to it. I know that in a lot of cases, I'm still hurt by racial comments made by white people and the way black students on campus are viewed by whites, especially campus police. – Robert

An article on the pepper spray incident was published in the New Bedford Standard-Times. The article was written by Megan Tench (1999), an investigative reporter who graduated from UMass Dartmouth. While enrolled at the university, Tench was an active participant in various campus activities that promoted an understanding of racial and cultural diversity. Although she is now removed from the daily activities of campus social life, Tench's article on the hip hop incident was insightful and candid. Additionally, her interviews with various students reflected the general sentiments of



African-American students who resent the fact they must create their own social and cultural activities in response to feeling excluded from the wider white-oriented social activities. According to Tench,

Often times, when blacks are gathered in great numbers, there is an unsubstantiated fear or irrational notion of dangerous intent. This is true for the society we live in and it is certainly true for the UMass Dartmouth campus. Students admit they feel uneasy about throwing functions geared toward a black population because they feel those functions are all too often targeted by officials and shut down quickly. (p. A-6)

### Summary Analysis: Coping Strategies of African-American Students

Confronting racial and cultural stereotypes was a critical issue facing many of the students who participated in this study. For example, Crystal and Elizabeth had to confront constantly stereotypes which suggested that they lacked the intellectual ability to perform academically at the collegiate level. On the other hand, Robert and Wayne encountered racial stereotypes which suggest that they make better athletes than scholars.

Although these students managed to cope successfully with racial and cultural stereotypes within the campus environment, Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito (1998) suggests that the negative attitudes and prejudicial treatment associated with such behaviors can have an adverse effect on the self-concept of African-American students. Additionally, being perceived as negative racial and cultural stereotypes can also affect the willingness of African-American students to interact with white students and to develop mature interpersonal relationships in a predominantly white college environment. This effect was evident in the stories of many students who felt that self-segregation was an important personal strategy that they used to protect themselves

from the experience of campus racism, to avoid negative stereotypes, and to affirm their racial identity.

Other strategies identified by students as important in helping them to adjust both socially and psychologically to the negative affects of campus racism, cultural prejudice, and negative stereotypes included oppositional behavior and black separatism. While these strategies were identified by students as an appropriate methodology for coping on a racially stressful predominantly white college campus, not all participating students believe that these strategies are most effective in gaining the kinds of experiences expected in a collegiate environment. For example, Yvette believes that the most effective coping strategy is for African-American students to “simply to get involved in the social life of the campus thereby forcing individuals of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds to interact with one another.

#### Students' Perceptions of Institutional Environment: Campus Climate

In further discussing social adjustment issues (Questions #12, #13, #14, & #15), one of the issues to emerge from students' perceptions was concern about institutional characteristics, namely the social climate of the campus environment, that negatively affect social integration. Within this environment, some students felt socially incongruent because of confrontation with individuals and situations which left them vulnerable to racial and cultural stereotypes. For Robert, Wayne, Crystal, Jackie, and Elizabeth, the debilitating results of racial and cultural stereotypes often challenged their self-perceptions and made it difficult for them to have an honest relationship with white faculty and students.



During his interview, Robert talked about the influence of racial stereotypes on his self-image. He was particularly concerned with almost daily confrontation with individuals who perceive him only as a basketball player and not as a student. Although Robert loves the game of basketball and often associates with other African-American students who participate in varsity sports at the university, he has never had the ability or the interest to play at the collegiate level. According to Robert,

I've been 6' 2" since I was 15. But I don't really play basketball. I mean, I haven't played ball two days in a row for over four years. And, I'm really not that good either. But people are always asking me, "you're tall, you play basketball? You on the team?" I've been going through that for a while. In fact, in almost every school I've attended people have asked me those questions. Even here, it just seems like people, particularly white students, assume that because I'm tall and I'm black that I must play basketball. But to be honest with you, I'm really all thumbs. Of course I sometimes play basketball with friends. But I'm not a competitive player. Yes, I have big hands, but I've been called Mr. Fumbles. But it doesn't matter. I just like playing for the fun of the game.

I have white friends who are just as tall as I am but they don't get those kinds of questions asked of them. I sometimes laugh 'cause I really think that it's a joke. I know I shouldn't laugh 'cause it's really not funny. But I haven't really given it much thought. If I were to think about it right now, I would say that their assumptions are really racist 'cause I don't hear people ask me, "Hey, Robert you're good at chemistry, you want to be a scientist or something? You want to be a scientist 'cause you're good in the sciences." Instead, they ask if I play basketball. It's like they really have no interest in me as a person or as a student. Perhaps that's why I don't like being around white people that much. Sometimes they just don't know what to say to me.

Although Wayne is also tall and was an outstanding athlete at Millersville University, he does not play basketball for UMass Dartmouth. Yet, like Robert, quite often Wayne is not taken seriously as a student. Instead, he is consistently referred to as "that tall basketball player" by many of his white classmates.

Maybe it's because I'm a black male or maybe it's because I'm tall, I don't know. But when I'm around white students they always ask me, "You play basketball, don't you? You play for the university?"

For some reason, I think our society has conditioned us to believe that if you're a tall black male, you're supposed to be playing basketball. And, if you're not playing basketball, then there must be something wrong with you. I really think that we're conditioned to believe that, 'cause every time you turn on the television, there is a commercial on with a black athlete with a basketball in his hands, -- either Michael Jordan or whatever. It's like guilty by association or in my case, by height. Everyone wants us to be like Mike. But like I said earlier, I want people to see me for who I am. I'm intelligent, mature, and now serious about my education. I'm not some dumb athlete. I know they don't see me as a serious student. I don't think they see me at all. Perhaps when I get my degree, they'll see me then.

As a student in the College Now program, Crystal has always felt that white faculty and students perceived her and other students of color as academically unprepared for college. She says:

I seriously do think that black students on campus are stereotyped. Most of the students who enter the College Now program, for example, are considered to be dumb kids 'cause they came in through an alternative admissions program. I guess that's why, when they manage to become sophomores, most of the College Now students don't even want to identify with the College Now program. I have a number of black friends who don't participate in the College Now program. They often feel like dumb affirmative action students.

Sometimes, if you're a student of color and you get good grades, people ask, "how's that possible?" I'm not the best student in the world but I tend to do really well, especially on writing assignments. I'm not the kind of student who studies all the time. I never have been. But I still get pretty good grades. But some of the white students think of me as a slacker, you know, lazy or whatever. So when I do well on class assignments they automatically assume that I'm getting special treatment from the professor. It would never cross their minds that I could just be smarter than them. They only think that I get special help 'cause I am black.

Jackie cannot recall a time when she has felt discriminated against because of her racial identity or because of her association with other students of color. However,



she quite frequently has to confront various stereotypes related to her size. In fact, being a size 24, Jackie often feels the stares, hears the comments, and actually sees how people, both blacks and whites, automatically make assumptions about her character, her health, and her motivation simply because of her weight.

I don't know if my racial identity affects how people perceive me. But, I do believe that my body size is what people react to first. I've been big all my life. But as I talk with people, I can just tell that they are not accepting of big people. Everyone has stereotypes about race and about size. I think that when people see a big black woman, the first thing they think of is that I'm this "that's my mamma type person." But when they get to know me, they realize that I'm not this stereotypical big black woman. But you know, there are a lot of people who are not open to individuals who are different in skin color or in body size. I still notice it, even here on campus. I don't know if I'm paranoid or not, but I do see people who stare. When I went to orientation, I came with a friend who is also my size. And when it came time for the campus tour, I could just tell that the orientation leaders wanted to exclude us because, well I guess because they thought we wouldn't be able to keep pace with the group because of our size.

I can remember once when I was going to buy a car and the salesman kept trying to get me to buy a really big car because of my size. But I wanted a small car, a Saturn, because that's what I wanted. I didn't care what I looked like in a small car. I just wanted a Saturn. I finally bought one, but from another dealer. So I've been stereotyped because of my race and my size all my life.

Despite the rich cultural diversity that exists between African-Americans and Cape Verdeans, and other students on color of campus, Elizabeth complains that whites constantly try to categorize, negatively stereotype, and discriminate against black people simply on the basis of skin color. In doing so, she believes that students of color are not appreciated and that they are denied full recognition of the cultural heritage that characterizes their background experiences.

I know I am a Cape Verdean woman. But white students don't see me as a Cape Verdean woman, they see me as a black women. So no matter how much Cape Verdeans have this pride thing, or feel that they should wear a

sticker across their heads saying they're Cape Verdean, some white people don't see that. They see blacks and Cape Verdeans as one group whether we like it or not. They see us as one group or a cluster of people.

Some white students have issues with race and are very prejudiced. And I have a problem with how they perceive us. As people of color, we share so many experiences with racial stereotypes and discrimination. And many white students will never ever experience what we've gone through. I don't think they know how to deal with us because of our rich diversity and history. I know that blacks and Cape Verdeans have different background experiences. We didn't all come here on slave ships, and we weren't all servants either. But I think white people are afraid because they don't know how to deal with our diversity. So they just put us all in the same category. But I really don't think that they have any idea that African-Americans and Cape Verdeans are as culturally diverse as they are. You know, Irish, Polish, Portuguese. I'm proud of my Cape Verdean heritage even though I also consider myself an African-American.

### Social Support Programs

In this study, participants were asked to describe how the university supports African-Americans students in becoming socially adjusted to the campus environment (Question #11). In responding to this question, commuter students were unable to identify a specific program, service, or department because of various commitments and responsibilities that left them feeling disconnected from the daily social activities of campus life. On the other hand, several residential students quickly identified Unity House as a key institutional resource that has helped to facilitate their social adjustment and integration into the campus environment. For example, Sherron mentioned,

Unity House is so important to students of color. That's where I am if I'm not in my room. If I'm trying to get some work done and I can't do it in my room, I'm at the Unity House doing it. And, that's where I see the majority of my people throughout the day and I'm saying hi to them and speaking to them. The Unity House is also where I get to know people and where we have our meetings like United Brothers and Sisters. We can come to the Unity House anytime and find a mentor among the black faculty and staff, people who are real role models.



Ludovice also has a strong emotional attachment to the Unity House. Since arriving on campus last fall, Ludovice has served as a cultural leader at the Unity House. As a cultural leader, she has been very involved in the development of various academic, cultural, and social programs that are specifically designed to assist students of color in their adjustment to the campus environment. She says:

Being in the Unity House, you know that there are a lot of your people around. So you automatically fit in. You feel more comfortable. Being around my people at the Unity House is great. It's a social environment where I can easily get involved in campus activities. Although I don't get a lot of work done, I really enjoy being there. But don't get me wrong. I do have study groups and stuff like that. But being at Unity House is more of a social experience for me -- hanging out, you know, being able to communicate with people from the same background or, for that matter, different backgrounds. We have so much in common and we can really relate to one another. When you talk to white people and learn about their background, you quickly find out that most of them are cliquish. They stick together. But that's okay. Although I don't mind interacting with white people, I really want to stick with my people, and the Unity House is where I can do that. It's one of the few places on campus where I can socialize and make new friends.

Unfortunately, African-American students who are actively involved in the Unity House often have to defend its mission and philosophy against a number of critics, both white and black. Many of these critics have argued that affinity groups, such as the Unity House, the United Brothers and Sisters (UBS), and the Cape Verdean Association, only serve to segregate students into ethnic or cultural groups that further divide students of color into separate identity groups.

Throughout the fall semester, Crystal was constantly confronted by her white classmates who did not fully understand the importance of the Unity House as a cultural center for all students on campus. According to Crystal:

I seriously think that there is a problem with racism on this campus. But I think it's very, very subtle. You really don't know that it's there 'cause

it's hidden so well on this campus. I can remember one time when I got outrageous and that was when Maria and myself and Nicole were walking back to the dorm and some guy in a red car shouted out to us "get out of the way niggers!" That was the only time I saw it blatantly out there but I think there is a lot of it on this campus. It's just not really shown. I've been in classes where you look around and you 're the only person of color. So it does intimidate. I'm fortunate in the sense that I grew up in a multi-racial family, so I don't feel uncomfortable around blacks or whites. But I can see how some black students might feel threatened being around so many white students.

I've been in classes where I was the only black student and the subject of color or something that deals with race relations would come up. Immediately, people would start complaining about the Unity House saying that it's just for black students. I was talking with a white student who told me that the day she came into the Unity House people were just staring at her. I said you know what, there are some students who will do that. But you have to realize that you just can't stereotype all black students because of something one of them might do. Although the Unity House is used primarily by students of color, it's open to all students on campus. And I think that everyone should go there because they can learn about our culture. In my opinion, the Unity House can help both blacks and whites to break cultural barriers and to get to know each other as individuals and as students. I always feel confident and secure at Unity House 'cause I'm around other students who are experiencing what I'm experiencing as a black students.

In response to those who would criticize the Unity House because of the perception of it being a facility only for black students, Sherron says:

Unity House can be used by whoever wants to use it. It's not supposed to be just for black students on campus. If the white students wanted to go there, they can. In fact, there are white kids there almost everyday. When they do come in, it's just because a black faculty member is holding a class there or something. I haven't seen that many white students at the Unity House. They pretty much think that Unity House is a hang-out for students of color. But when they do come in, nobody tells them, "Oh, you can't come in here 'cause you're white!" To me, the Unity House is like a home away from home. That's where black students feel comfortable. The white kids can go to class and say whatever they want about Unity House. We can come here and say whatever we want and do whatever we want to do. Some people might think that we're trying to segregate ourselves from white students, but I don't see it that way. Everyone is welcomed at Unity House, including white students, faculty, and staff.



## Transfer Orientation

In this study, students were asked to describe their perceptions of transfer orientation as well as experiences within the orientation process, that influenced their adjustment and transition into the campus social environment (Questions #1, #2, #3, & #4). Although not all of the students in this study attended orientation, those who did spoke candidly about their orientation experience.

When I first arrived on campus, I didn't know anybody. I didn't know where I was or even why I was here. And I didn't see a black face anywhere. To me, this campus seemed like the strangest place. Coming from Pennsylvania, I was used to a big campus with a lot of black students and a very active campus life. But here, all the buildings looked the same. I just felt totally lost. I even started to get back in my car and just drive home. But, where was I to go. The next day, I met a couple of other black students at transfer orientation. One of them was from the Boston area. At orientation, when I was looking around, I was surprised to find that we were the only black students in the whole auditorium. I knew UMass Dartmouth was a predominantly white school. But I was like man, if this is any indication of how few black people there are, then I knew that we would have a difficult time adjusting. At that point, I was really beginning to wonder if I had made a mistake transferring to this university. But I said, "I'm here now, and it's too late to transfer to another college. – Wayne

For students of color, I think transfer orientation is very, very important, especially if they are able to talk with someone who is honest about what this school is all about, academically and socially. Although I attended orientation, I wasn't interested in meeting people, making friends, or socializing with other students. I wasn't interested in that stuff. I just wanted to register, get my credit evaluation, and get back home as soon as possible 'cause I have a family and a full-time job. So for me, orientation was necessary because I had to register for courses offered at a certain time. What disturbed me the most about orientation was how few black students were there. I transferred from a predominantly white community college. So I'm sort of used to there not being a lot of black students around campus. But I thought for sure that there would be a lot more black transfer students coming into the university. I mean, just think of the number of community colleges in Massachusetts. There have to be more black transfer students. – Raymond

When I came to orientation, I really didn't see any students of color as orientation leaders or in any leadership positions for that matter. From that experience, I just assumed that there might be a problem on campus between black and white students. I was sure African-American students on campus were faced with racial and other problems that they normally experience at any predominantly white institution. I don't think that racism is limited to just white professors. I'm not saying this because of any particular instance that happened to me during orientation. I just know that on most white campuses, blacks have a difficult time socially and academically. I know that I'm generalizing. But, the evidence was quite clear when I saw that there were very few black orientation leaders.

You know, when I decided to transfer to this university, my mother and step father thought that Umass Dartmouth was so far away. Like most parents, my parents were really very protective of me, and I can appreciate their concerns. But, my goodness, I'm not a baby. Although I'm not a freshman, my parents attended one of the freshman orientation programs. My mother was especially concerned who my roommate was going to be and the fact that I would be moving so far away. But, I think my father kinda assured her that everything would be okay. – Wanda

At first I didn't realize that there was an orientation for transfer students, but I really didn't care. I just wanted to register and find out how many of my credits would transfer into my major. Maybe it would have been nice for me to attend orientation 'cause in September I was really lost. For almost two weeks that fall semester, I ran into only one person I knew, and she was from the Cape, and I asked her all kinds of questions, like "Where's the library? Where's the bookstore? Where's the administration building?" I felt really stupid 'cause I didn't know anything about the university or anyone on campus except her. But I still don't believe that coming to orientation would have made a difference. Besides I attended orientation at my previous school and I just hated it. Now I'm older and I don't want to be treated like a freshman all over again. - Elizabeth

I knew this was a predominantly white school. In fact, when I first applied, I was worried that there would be too many white people here. Coming from a predominantly black college, I still have a problem with this whole race thing, you know, the way some white people treat blacks. But that's not why I am here. I am not worried about making a lot of black friends or a lot of white friends. I consider myself to be a very sociable person. And I just didn't see the importance of coming to orientation just to make friends. I felt like I had to get myself together, grade-wise, before I could feel comfortable with such things as making friends or getting involved socially. Besides, I take care of my little brothers and sisters over the summer and I can't leave them at home by



themselves just to attend orientation. So I guess maybe those are some of the reasons why I didn't particularly care about attending orientation. I did all that at my other college – Ludovice

I didn't attend orientation 'cause I applied for admissions late in August. At that time, I had a summer job and I had to make some money for school. But from my previous college experience, I don't think that attending orientation would make a big difference in black-white relationships on campus. I also don't think that coming to orientation would have changed my perceptions of this campus. I think the only thing transfer orientation is good for is to help students find their way around campus -- where the buildings are and stuff like that. I think that the whole thing about meeting people at orientation is overrated. Most of the times, people stick with those who they are most comfortable with. A one-day orientation program is not going to change how people relate to one another. Although I'm sure that most of the faculty and staff who participated in orientation were really nice, that's expected. White faculty in particular will give you the impression that that's how they are all the time. But I know better. For students of color, particularly African-American students, things on this campus aren't always that great, particularly when it comes to dealing with white faculty members. – Sherron

### Summary Analysis: Students' Perceptions of the Campus Environment

According to the literature, institutional social support systems, and the relationships that surround this phenomenon, are complex and multidimensional (Kenny & Stryker, 1996). Yet at predominantly white colleges, social support systems are critically important in facilitating the adjustment and integration of African-American students into the college environment (Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, & Wilson, 1999).

At UMass Dartmouth, Unity House was established as a multicultural center, reflecting the university's commitment to develop an integrated learning environment that fosters cultural diversity and inclusion. To that end, many of the programs and services of the Unity House encourage respect, recognition, and an appreciation of racial and cultural diversity among students, faculty, and staff. In fact, according to its

mission statement, Unity House also serves as an academic and social support system specifically designed to enhance the enrollment, retention, and degree persistence of students of color.

Although there are a number of other departments within this system, it is interesting to note that participating students recognized only the Unity House as a key institutional resource that provides opportunities for them to make a smooth transition into the university community. As noted in their narratives, these opportunities include the chance to “find a mentor... role models,” “gain confidence and feel secure,” “get involved in campus life,” “socialize and make friends,” and “feel comfortable” on campus. For these students, Unity House does facilitate their social adjustment and integration into the campus environment as confirmed in the literature.

In reading the narratives of participating students, it was particularly pleasing to see that they also acknowledged the efforts of Unity House to enhance the quality of campus life for all students, not just students of color. However, despite this most daring challenge, Unity House continues to be criticized by those who perceive it simply as a means to segregate African-American students from the culture and norms of the dominant white student population on campus. Fortunately, African-American students feel comfortable defending the reasons for which the Unity House was established. According to Crystal, “Unity House can help both blacks and whites to break cultural barriers and to get to know each other as individuals and as students.”

Finally, the literature is clear in acknowledging that for many African-American students, negative perceptions of a predominantly white college environment “often inhibit their social, intellectual, moral, and emotional development,” making it more



difficult for them to become fully integrated into campus life (Pounds, 1990, p. 278). In this study, negative perceptions of the campus environment were particularly acute for Ludovice and Sherron beginning with their orientation experience. Transferring from a predominantly black college, they believed that racism was an important issue confronting students of color at the university. For example, in her narrative, Ludovice commented that, "Coming from a predominantly black college, I still have a problem with this whole race thing. When I first applied, I was worried that there would be too many white people here."

Sherron also presumed that the campus was not friendly toward students of diverse backgrounds when she commented, "For African-American students, things on this campus aren't always that great, particularly when it comes to dealing with white faculty members."

Negative perceptions of the campus environment also led some of African-American students to believe that UMass Dartmouth is like most predominantly white institutions - unresponsive to the needs and concerns of African-American students (Pounds, 1987). For example, according to Sherron, "white faculty in particular will give you the impression that that's how they are all the time, but I know better." Ludovice expressed similar sentiments when she mentioned "I still have a problem with this whole race thing - you know, the way some white people treat blacks."

Yet the research suggests that orientation is a critical link in helping students to make "a smooth transition and adjustment to collegiate life while at the same time breaking down some of the fears and anxieties that may exist" (Cook, 1996, p. 49).

In this study, most students identify transfer orientation as an important institutional support program designed to enhance the integration of into the campus environment. This one-day program provides students with various opportunities -- the chance to meet peers, an identification of services to support their personal, social, and academic needs, an introduction to campus life from a students' perspective, and the opportunity to meet key faculty and staff. Yet, while Elizabeth, Ludovice, and Sherron were well aware of the intent of the transfer orientation program, they decided not to attend because they were not interested in "making friends, "being treated like a freshman," reliving an experience they "hated".

In addition, although students anticipated some difficulty in adjusting socially to the campus environment, none felt that the orientation program would change their perceptions of the university or their perceptions of the relationships between black students and white students. Nor did they believe that by attending orientation, they would have received the kind of support, mentoring, social interactions, and encouragement they needed to survive in a predominantly white institution.

Being older, Elizabeth, Ludovice, and Sherron believed that their adjustment and transition into the university community would be just as successful without attending a formal orientation program. They perceived orientation simply as a social event, and they were not interested in becoming socially integrated into the environment. Instead, their most immediate concern was to register and then resume their normal life, which included family responsibilities and full-time summer employment.



On the other hand, when they applied for admission to the university, Wayne, Wanda, and Raymond were encouraged by their beliefs that the campus environment, as described in various university publications, was friendly, accepting, and supportive of individuals of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and experiences. From the enrollment materials mailed with the admissions acceptance packet, they learned that the goals and objectives of orientation were quite simple -- to assist new students in making a successful transition into the college environment. They, therefore, felt that they would have no problem adjusting socially or academically to the university. They also looked forward to attending orientation so that they could meet other transfer students, particularly students of color.

Unfortunately, when they arrived for orientation, Wayne, Wanda, and Raymond all felt culturally incongruent, socially isolated, and dissatisfied with the lack of community within the student body, and particularly among students of color. Their experiences at orientation even caused them to question their decision to enroll at the university. This is clearly evident in the following comments: "I was beginning to wonder if I had made a mistake transferring to UMass Dartmouth." "What disturbs me the most about orientation was how few black students were there." "I just automatically assumed that there may be a problem on this campus between black and white students."

### Chapter Summary

The literature suggests that students who are integrated into the social life of the college environment are more likely to remain committed to the institution, satisfied

with their collegiate experience, and determined to complete their educational objectives (Tinto, 1975). This perspective on college persistence is true especially among traditional college freshmen who initially begin their post-secondary education at a four-year college and who reside on campus. However, among community college transfers, this perspective has met with mixed results because of various background characteristics and experiences that can influence patterns of social integration.

In this study, a qualitative in-depth interviewing process was employed to examine the perceptions of the 16 African American community college transfer students about the experience of social integration in a predominantly white four-year college environment. This process also allowed students to describe, in a narrative format, personal characteristics and background experiences that influenced their social perceptions and experiences within the college environment.

Within their narratives, students discussed the importance of racial identity on their collegiate experiences, especially their perceptions of social integration, their personal and academic development, and their interpersonal interactions within the campus environment. Students also revealed a number of other factors that influenced their social integration within the campus environment. Included among these factors were critical childhood experiences involving race relations, previous college experiences, peer group associations, academic expectations, career aspirations, employment and family obligations, and motivations for continuing their college education.



From the analysis of students' personal narratives and perceptions of the experience of social integration at UMass Dartmouth, several themes or central messages emerged. These emerging themes can be generalized as follows:

- family values, attitudes, and expectations about racial identity are complex and significantly influence how students perceive their social integration and interactions with faculty, staff, and peers within the college environment.
- students' involvement in social activities is influenced by their previous college experiences, their expectations of campus life, and their perceptions of campus climate.
- positive classroom interactions help to connect students to their peers and their faculty while enhancing the process of social perceptions and social integration.
- student-faculty relationships influence both academic and social integration.
- neither black students or white students fully understand or appreciate the racial diversity and cultural differences that influence their social interactions.
- racial identity development and perceptions of racial identity continue to influence the social interactions and inter-group relations between African-American students interaction.

- cultural prejudice among African-American and Cape Verdean students was a common experience that impeded their ability to develop positive interpersonal relationships.
- for African-American students, the social and psychological adjustments associated with being in a predominately white university was a challenging experience that caused them to sometimes question their own abilities and beliefs about environmental supportiveness.
- for many students, the social and psychological adjustments that came with living with a white roommate were complicated by social values, family expectations, and the previous social experiences students brought to the campus environment.
- African-American students are confronted daily with racial and cultural stereotypes that negatively affect their social interactions throughout the campus environment.
- self-segregation is a strategy often used by black students to affirm their identity, their group solidarity, and their ability to cope with racial harassment.
- students perceived the development of Unity House was only one strategy that the university employed to address and support their social adjustment issues.
- because of their personal background and previous college experiences, black students were generally not interested in the traditional socialization activities that characterize the transfer orientation program.



- for African-American students, their ability to successfully adjust to racially stressful situations, within the campus environment, reflects their attitudes about racial identity, their perceptions of race related stressors, and their individual style of focusing on, coping with, or resolving race related problems.
- because they were numerically underrepresented, students often felt isolated, alienated, and even uncomfortable being the only person of color in certain academic and social situations.
- although the Unity House was perceived as a valuable campus resource for African-American students, students who actively participated in the programs and services provided through this department sometimes felt self-segregated from the majority students and disconnected from mainstream campus activities.
- despite the perception of not being fully integrated into the social community of the campus environment, African-American students expressed satisfaction with their educational experience at the university.
- perceptions of racism and incidents of racial discrimination were common experiences confronting African-American students.
- some of the students often had a difficult time approaching or interacting with white faculty members because of perceptions of racism.
- prior to enrolling at the university, most of the students had been socialized to expect and prepared for racially hostile encounters within the campus environment.

Chapter 5 provides a visual interpretation of students' experiences of social integration at UMass Dartmouth. These illustrations reflect the perceptions of students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the main characters. Chapter 6 detailed the findings of students' social perceptions of the college environment.



## CHAPTER 5

### DATA ANALYSIS: A VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS

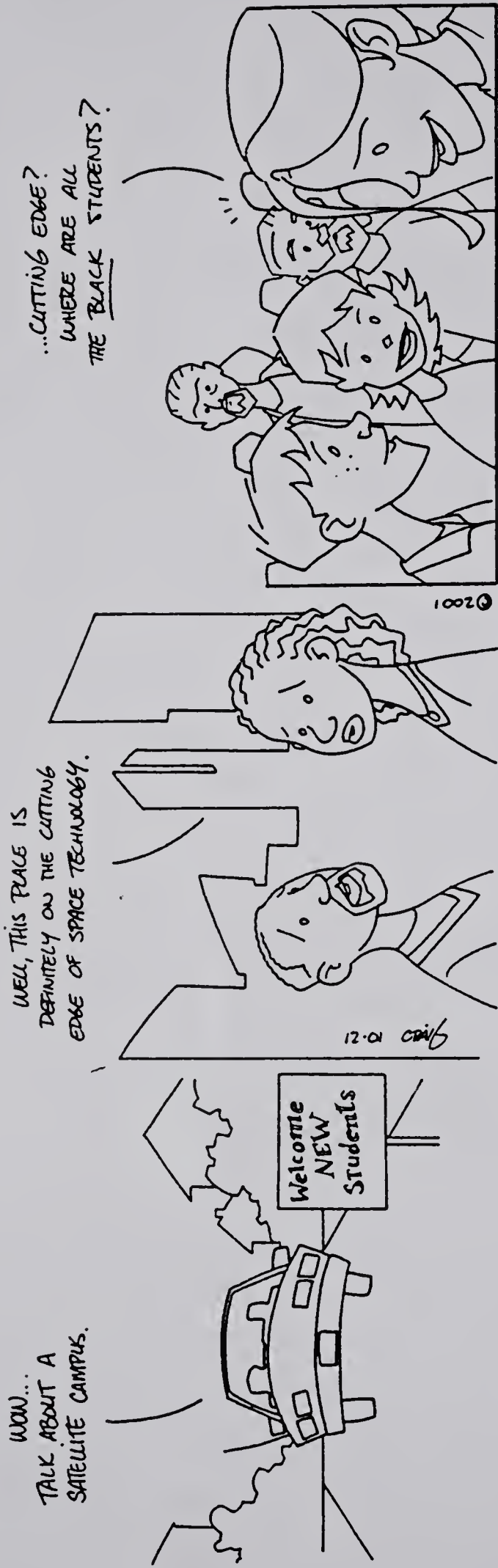
#### Introduction

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the social perceptions of African-American community college transfer students at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, a predominantly white institution. In that chapter, the issues that emerged from students' narratives about social perceptions were categorized thematically, enabling participating students to tell their story in their own words.

This chapter contains the researcher's attempt to provide a visual interpretation of the social perceptions and experiences of students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the "main characters." Using the same story board format displayed in the College Norms series, these illustrations are grouped thematically in Panels 1 through 10, below.

It is impossible to provide a visual interpretation of all of the issues that emerged from students' social perceptions as revealed in their personal narratives. However, the pictorials that are discussed in this chapter should help to make sense of the realities of campus life as perceived and experienced by the African-American community college transfer students who transferred to the university.

# college norms™ by norm:craig



Section 1

Section 3

Panel 1  
A Visual Interpretation:  
Students' Initial Perceptions of a Predominantly White College Environment

Continued, next page.



Panel 1, continued:

Panel 1, Section 1

A Visual Interpretation:

Student's Initial Perceptions of a Predominantly White College Environment

Theme: Orientation to the Campus Environment

Subject: Student's Initial Perceptions of a Predominantly White College Environment significantly influence their educational experiences, personal development, and social interactions.

Research: In a study of the experiences of black students at white colleges and universities, Pounds (1987) noted that in "their transition from the previous social environment to the unknown and often intimidating" predominantly white college environment, African-American students often encounter a number of social perceptions that make integration and persistence extremely difficult (p. 278).

Findings: In this study, initial perceptions of the campus environment and the social and psychological adjustments associated with being in a predominately white university were challenging experiences that caused many African-American students to question their own abilities and their beliefs about the university's commitment to the enrollment and persistence of African-American students.

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Panel 1, continued:

Over the last several years, the number of African-American community college students transferring to UMass Dartmouth has increased.

Unfortunately, as with most African-American students in predominantly white college environments, one of the first developmental challenges facing African-American community college transfers at UMass Dartmouth is the perception that the campus environment is unfriendly, unsupportive, and insensitive to the needs and expectations of students of color. However, to change this perception, various university publications characterize the residence halls as living-learning environment where students develop personally and academically as they transition into college life. The residential halls are also characterized as an ideal social environment where students can learn about individual differences, build a sense of community, and become fully integrated into all aspects of campus life.

Unfortunately, in this study many students felt that their residential experience did not provide them with a sense of community or with the opportunity to truly learn about others who culturally different. This was especially evident for students who encountered situations where racial stereotypes and cultural prejudice created a climate of distrust and

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Panel 1, continued:

hostility thereby causing some to feel unwelcome and unwanted even in their own residential community.

Narrative: When I first arrived on campus, I didn't know anybody. I didn't know where I was or even why I was here. And I didn't see a black face anywhere. To me, this campus seemed like the strangest place. Coming from Pennsylvania, I was used to a big campus with a lot of black students and a very active campus life. But here, all the buildings looked the same. I just felt totally lost. I even started to get back in my car and just drive home. But, where was I to go. – Wayne

Sound Bite: When I first got here, this campus seemed like the strangest place. All the buildings looked the same. I felt totally lost.” - Wayne

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Student's Initial Perceptions of the College Environment

Illustrative Analysis: At most predominantly white colleges, African-American students often feel socially segregated and isolated from mainstream campus life. Such was Wayne's experience when he first arrived at UMass Dartmouth (see

Continued, next page.

Panel 1, continued:

Panel 1, section 1). Intimidated by the size of the campus and the visible absence of African-American students at transfer orientation, Wayne's initial perceptions of the college environment made it extremely difficult for him to feel welcomed at the university or to find a community of students with whom he could identify.

Panel 1, Section 3

A Visual Interpretation: Feeling Alienated and Isolated in a Predominantly White College Environment

Theme: Transition to College

Subject: Adjusting to being a minority in a predominantly white college environment

Research: Efforts to assist community college transfer students in adjusting and becoming integrated into the campus environment have historically fallen under the rubric of orientation. In fact, orientation programs that focus on critical adjustment and developmental issues can also help

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Panel 1, continued:

students in making a smoothly and successfully adjustment into the college environment (Palmer, 1996). Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult for African-American students to fully understand, appreciate, or even get involved in the various developmental and social adjustment activities available at orientation when they do not feel comfortable or welcomed within such an environment.

Findings: In this study, it was evident that because of their personal background and previous college experiences, African-American community college transfer students were generally not interested in participating in the traditional social adjustment activities that characterize the transfer orientation program. Yet, they often felt alienated and isolated from mainstream campus life.

Narrative: The next day, I met a couple of other black students at transfer orientation. One of them was from the Boston area. At orientation, when I was looking around, I was surprised to find that we were the only black students in the whole auditorium. I knew UMass Dartmouth was a predominantly white school. But I was like man, if this is any indication

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Panel 1, continued:

of how few black people there are, then I knew that we would have a difficult time adjusting. At that point, I was really beginning to wonder if I had made a mistake transferring to this university. But I said, “I’m here now, and it’s too late to transfer to another college. - Wayne

Sound Bite: “What disturbed me the most about orientation was how few black students were there.” - Raymond

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Feeling Alienated and Isolated in a Predominantly White College Environment

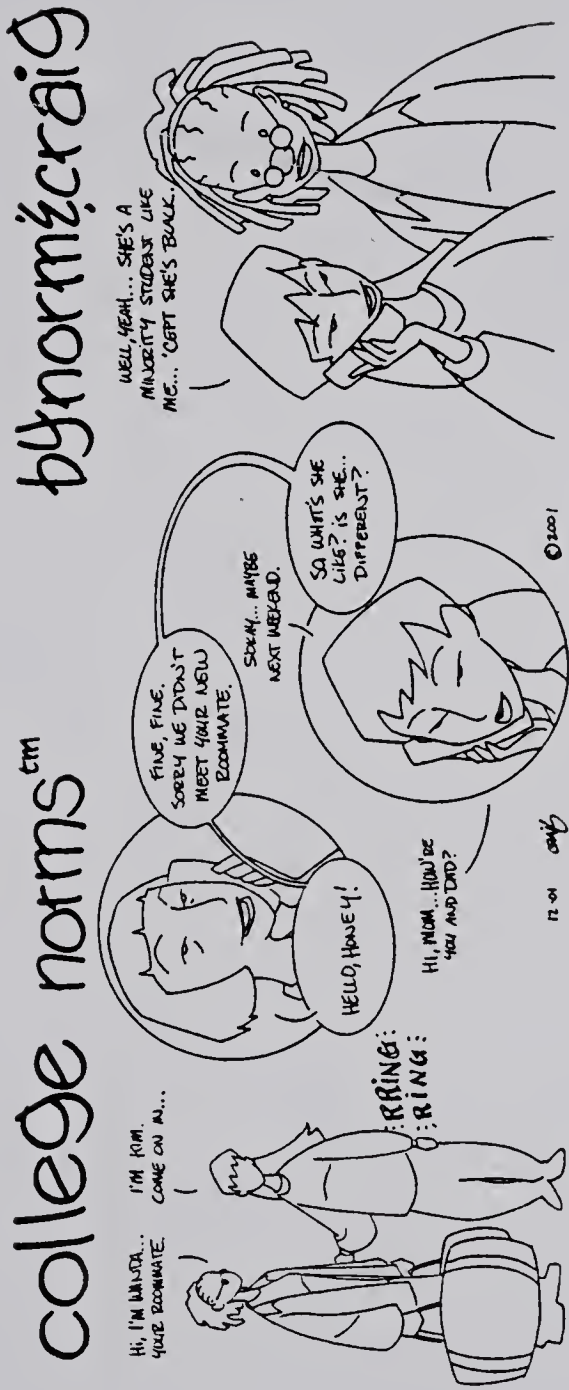
Illustrative Analysis: In his efforts to adjust to the size and characteristics of the campus environment. Wayne walked around campus trying to find other black students with whom he could identify (see Panel 1, section 3). It was at that point that Wayne really begin to feel isolated within the university community. Wayne’s narrative reflection on his orientation experience is a constant reminder that in a predominantly white college environment it is sometimes difficult for African-American students to find a significant black community or even whites students who are insensitive

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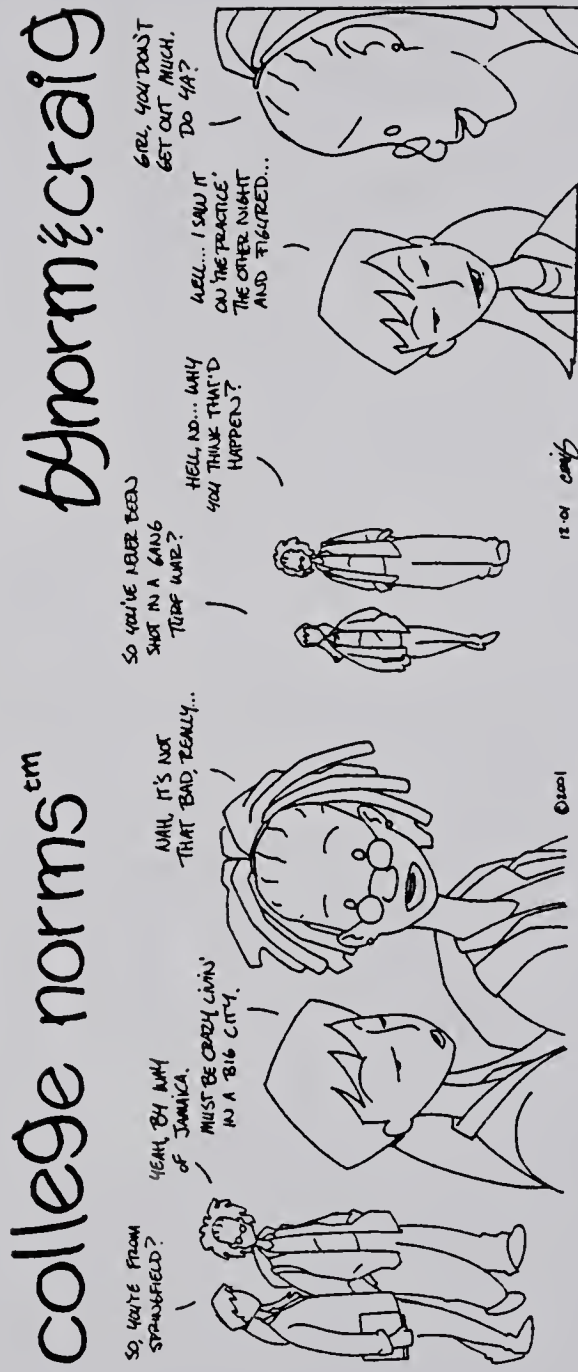


Panel 1, continued:

to how students of color perceived and experienced the campus environment.



Panel 2: A Visual Interpretation: Confronting Racism and Cultural Prejudice on Campus



Panel 3: A Visual Interpretation: Confronting Racism and Cultural Prejudice on Campus

Continued, next page.



Panels 2 and 3, continued:

Theme: Confronting Everyday Cultural Prejudice on Campus

Subject: Prejudice Among Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Research: In predominantly white colleges and universities, African-American students are often confronted with what Waller's (1998) refers to as individual and cultural racism. According to Waller, individual racism is defined as "an individual's negative prejudicial attitude or discriminatory behavior toward people of a given race" (p. 47). On the other hand, Waller defines cultural racism as "the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage over that of another race" (p. 49). Although both individual and cultural racism are intertwined, Waller further argues that "cultural racism is intractable, subtle, and insidious" (p. 50). Additionally, Waller asserts that modern forms of racism have become much more sophisticated and "depend less on brute force than on psychological methods that dissipate resistance. In such forms, racism may in fact create the illusion that it does not exist. Yet its power to oppress is no less than that of open and blatant racism" (Waller, 1998, p. 99).

Continued, next page.

Panels 2 and 3, continued:

**Findings:** In this study, it was evident that neither black students or white students fully understood or appreciated their individual differences, with respect to social and cultural diversity, and how these differences influenced their social interactions.

**Narrative:** Now that I think about it, I really think [my roommate] reacted to me more out of anger than racism ‘cause before she told me how she felt, she was really a nice person. I seriously think she let her emotions and our differences stand in the way of our friendship. I often wonder how she would have reacted to me if I was white. -  
Wanda

**Sound Bite:** “I seriously think she let her emotions and our individual differences stand in the way of our friendship.” – Wanda

**Illustration:** A Visual Interpretation: Cultural Conflicts Between Roommates

Continued, next page.



Panels 2 and 3, continued:

Illustrative Analysis: A visual interpretation of the cultural prejudice Wanda perceived in her roommate is illustrated in Panel 2. An Asian American, Kim was adopted by a white family. Overly protected by her parents, Kim had very few social interactions with African-Americans prior to enrolling at UMass Dartmouth. However, it was evident to Wanda that although Kim perceived herself as a minority, there were obvious differences between them, and it was these differences stood in the way of their friendship. Panel 3 provides an illustrative analysis of an experience shared by Wanda in which she described Kim's prejudicial attitudes and stereotypical beliefs about African-Americans who reside in the inner-cities. In analyzing Kim's comments, it is obvious that her perceptions of African-Americans were significantly influenced by the media and not by direct social interactions. Unfortunately, Kim's cultural prejudice about blacks and her perceptions of African-Americans influenced how she interacted socially with Wanda, demonstrating clearly the cultural prejudice that exist among students of color.

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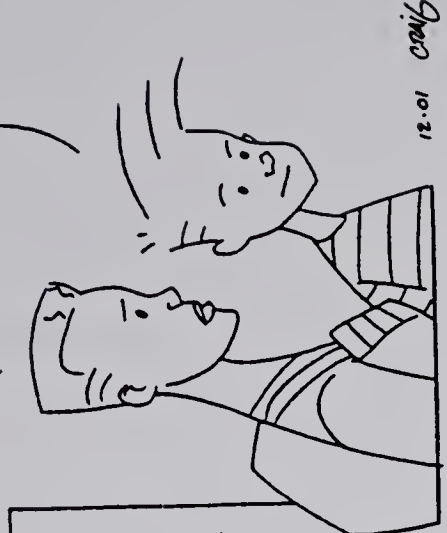
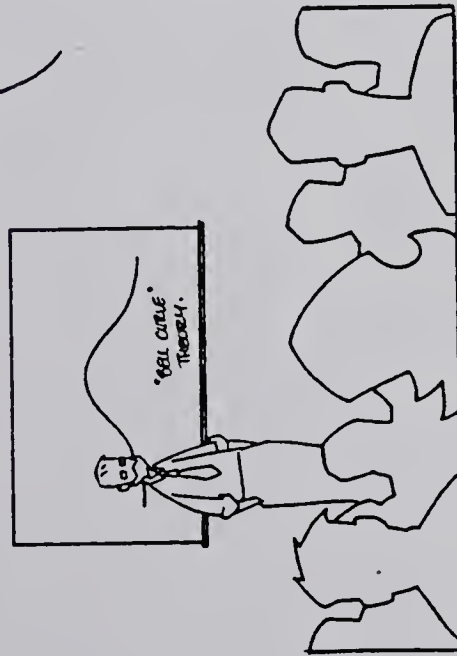
WE HAVE DEFINITELY FOUND  
CRACKS IN THE BELL CURVE.

UNLIKE DATA IN THE BOOK,  
THESE FAULTS CAN BE PROVEN  
WITH SCIENTIFIC LOGIC.

SO, FORGET ALL THAT  
YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT  
IQ AND SOCIAL CLASS.  
FURTHERMORE...

SO, WHADDYA THINK  
'BOUT THIS BELL  
CURVE THEORY?

IT'S ABOUT AS CRACKED  
AS THE LIBERTY BELL...



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Panel 4: A Visual Interpretation: Perceptions of Academic Integration – Inclusive Teaching



Panel 4, continued:

Theme: Perceptions of Academic Integration from an African-American Student's Perspective

Subject: Inclusive Teaching in the Classroom

Research: Research on college student development suggests that the quality of faculty "academic advising process has the potential to provide a vital link between [students] and the college, [to] reduce alienation and enhance learning, and contribute to a student's sense of belonging to the college environment" (Kramer & Kramer, 1989, p. 106).

Findings: In this study, it was found that:

- Some of the students often had a difficulty time approaching or interacting with white faculty members because of perceptions of racism.
- Positive classroom interactions help to connect students to their peers and their faculty while enhancing the process of social perceptions and social integration.
- Student-faculty relationships influence both academic and social integration.

Continued, next page.

Panel 4, continued:

Narrative: Every time I meet with some of the white teachers, I feel really uncomfortable. It's like my heart is going to stop or it's going to come out of my mouth. I just don't want to see my advisor or to talk to him unless it's absolutely necessary. I just don't want to go to his office 'cause I'll feel even more depressed after our meeting. Believe me, my advisor sometimes makes me feel like a loser. Maybe he thinks all black people are losers. I don't know. - Mildred

Sound Bite: "I don't know what to expect from teachers here at the university. I just don't understand why some of them have acted so racist towards me." - Mildred

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Perceptions of Academic Integration

Illustrative Analysis: At the beginning of this research study, it was expected that African-American students would complain that white faculty made them feel devalued, demeaned, or misunderstood. Yet, I was surprised to learn that most of the students who participated in this study were satisfied

Continued, next page.



Panel 4, continued:

with the relationship they had established with white faculty and academic advisors. In fact, throughout the interviews, many of the students characterized faculty as being friendly, respectful, and concerned about their educational development. Some of them even expressed appreciation in the fact that faculty often facilitate classroom discussions on controversial research topics on the history and culture of African-Americans (See Panel 4). Such discussions help to dispel racist theories that encourage ideas and beliefs about white supremacy.

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Continued, next page.

Panel 5: A Visual Interpretation: Perceptions of Academic Integration – Faculty-Student Interactions in the Classroom



Panel 5, continued:

Theme: Perceptions of Academic Integration from an African-American Students  
Perspective

Subject: Faculty-Student Interactions in the Classroom

Research: In their research on the classroom experiences of black students at white colleges and universities, Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996) note that a “characteristic experience of black students in predominantly white universities is feeling the burden placed on them by whites to act as defenders and explainers of their group” (p. 91).

Findings: Because they were numerically underrepresented, students often felt isolated, alienated, and even uncomfortable being the only person of color in certain academic and social situations.

Narrative: I also don’t participate in class discussions as much as I should. It seems that the white kids can go in class and say whatever they want. But we can’t do that, ‘cause when we do, white professors and white students look at you like you’re crazy. Then they’ll

Continued, next page.

Panel 5, continued:

say, “What are you talking about?” And being the only black student in a class of white kids can really be intimidating. It’s like, “Oh, I don’t want to say this and look like a fool or the teacher might come out and criticize me.” But there are a lot of different reasons why I don’t speak up in class - feeling intimidated, looking stupid, being alienated. Those are only a few of the reasons. So I pretty much keep my comments and my questions to myself. I participate as much as I need to, but not enough. I don’t speak enough. I really just say enough so that my grade won’t be affected. - Sherron

Sound Bite: “I’ve been in classes where I was the only person of color and the subject of black crime would be discussed, or someone would start complaining about the Unity House, and I find myself having to defend black people and their accomplishments.” – Crystal

Illustration: Perceptions of Academic Integration: Faculty-Student Interactions in the Classroom

Continued, next page.



Panel 5, continued:

Illustrative      Another common theme that emerged from the qualitative narratives  
Analysis:        was the praise of the African-American students for the quality of  
instruction demonstrated by black faculty members. Quite frequently,  
African-American students credit certain black professors with  
contributing to their own identity development by challenging them  
academically and spending quality time with them outside the classroom.  
However, it is unreasonable for predominantly white colleges and  
universities to expect African-American faculty to serve as mentors,  
advisors, role models, and friends to all of the students of color .

While it is true that most African-American students would prefer to be  
taught by faculty of color, the literature provides evidence of the  
importance of all faculty, both black and white, in helping students of  
color become fully integrated into the academic community and to in  
pursuing the baccalaureate degree. However, I believe that for white  
faculty members to be effective at teaching and advising students of  
color, they must be willing to examine and challenge their own attitudes  
and beliefs about cultural diversity. After all, as evident in Panel 5, there

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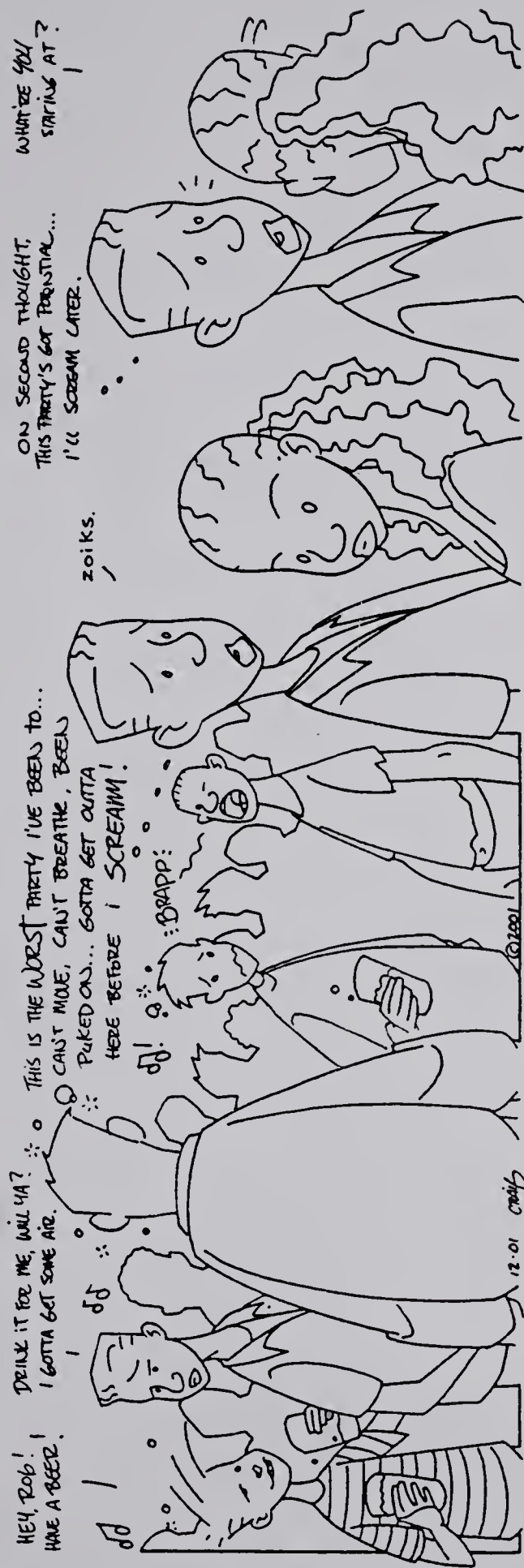
Panel 5, continued:

are still too many faculty who are unwilling to understand or appreciate the individual differences students of color bring to the campus environment with respect to academic development, social and cultural diversity, and career aspirations.



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Panel 6: A Visual Interpretation: Perceptions of Social Integration – Feelings of Alienation among African-American Students

Continued, next page.

Panel 6, continued:

Theme:                   Feeling alienated and alone at white social events

Subject:            The Absence of positive social communities that maximize student participation and interaction

Research:       In a 1997 study by the Harvard School of Public Health, researchers found that “44 percent of college students were binge drinkers,” and that white college students were 2.6 times more likely than black students to engage in consume alcohol excessively (Cross, 1998, p. 41). Differences in the rate of alcohol consumption among black and white college students are not fully understood. However, in the completion of this research study, what emerged from the stories of participating African-American community college students was evidence that binge drinking among black students is not valued behavior. Yet, when African-American students attend parties where binge drinking takes place, they often feel very uncomfortable.

Continued, next page.



Panel 6, continued:

Findings: In this study, it was found that:

- Perceptions and experiences of social segregation were common African-American students.
- Prior to enrolling at the university, most of the students had been socialized to expect and prepared for racially hostile encounters within the campus environment.

Narrative: I've gone to parties given by white students. It was interesting. They played regular music. You know, rock and roll and country music. But it was a different kind of experience. A lot of them just stand around drinking. I mean, they're so into drinking. Black students drink to be social and stuff like that. But it seems that white students drink just to get all drunk and everything. It was a different environment. But it wasn't bad, just different. I didn't really feel that I fit in at all.

Sound Bite: "Sometimes I believe that the differences in how black students and white students party or socialize often keeps them socially segregated." - Ludovice

Continued, next page.

Panel 6, continued:

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Perceptions of Socially Alienation among African-American Students

Illustrative Analysis: A visual interpretation of the experiences of African-American students at a party given by white students is illustrated in Panel 6. In this illustration, Robert shares his thoughts, feelings, and frustrations of being a minority in a white-dominated social environment where binge drinking is a common experience. While many African-American students admitted to consuming alcohol, they did so in moderation only to heighten their sociability. However, most of the participating African-American students were quick to admit that they tend to avoid predominantly white campus parties or other social events, especially if it appears there is heavy or out-of-control drinking done solely for the purpose of getting drunk. This is not to say that African-American students completely avoid parties or other social events given by white students. In a small residential campus environment such as UMass Dartmouth, it is inevitable that black and white students will attend parties together, particularly those held off-campus. However, African-American students at these events often feel isolated, unwelcome, and

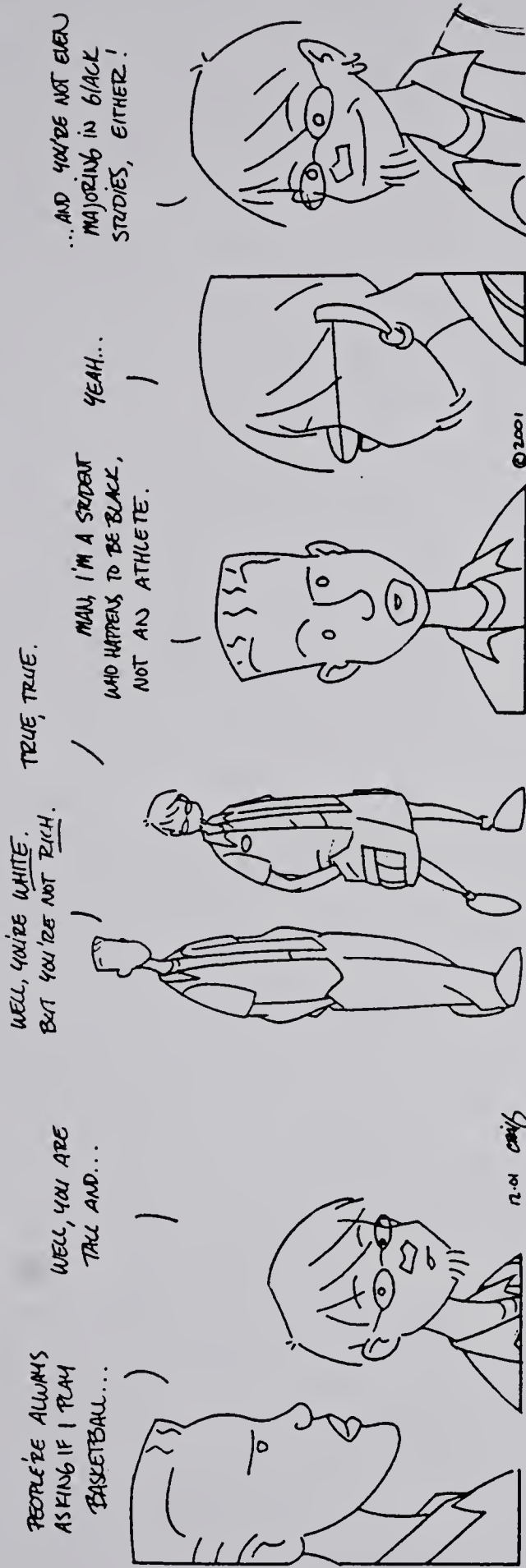
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Panel 6, continued:

even disconnected from those who appear to engage in out-of-control alcohol consumption.

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Panel 7: A Visual Interpretation: Confronting Racial Stereotypes – Perceptions of the Black Male

Continued, next page.



Panel 7, continued:

Theme: Adjusting to Difficult Campus Social Issues

Subject: The Stereotype of the Black Athlete

Research: One of the most enduring themes to emerge from the stories of this study's African-American community college students was the experience of being judged by racial stereotypes. Most of these stereotypes involve generalizations based on a distorted perception of the physical characteristics or academic abilities of African-American students. Waller (1998) asserts that when we generalize, we usually group or classify people, places, or things according to the traits they share. In this research study, one of the stereotypes African-American males constantly endured was the belief and generalization that they make good athletes but poor scholars.

According to Feagin, Vera, and Imani (1996), another characteristic experienced shared by the African-American students at predominantly white colleges is the old stereotype of black incompetence. From the research, they conclude that the theory of black incompetence "seems to

Continued, next page.

Panel 7, continued:

lie just beneath the surface of certain professorial assumptions about [the academic ability of] African-American students” (p. 87).

**Findings:** In this study, African-American students shared experiences of how they were confronted daily with racial and cultural stereotypes that negatively affect their social interactions throughout the campus environment.

**Narrative:** Maybe it's because I'm a black male or maybe it's because I'm tall, I don't know. But when I'm around white students they always ask me, “You play basketball, don't you? You play for the university?” For some reason, I think our society has conditioned us to believe that if you're a tall black male, you're supposed to be playing basketball. And, if you're not playing basketball, then there must be something wrong with you. I really think that we're conditioned to believe that, 'cause every time you turn on the television, there is a commercial on with a black athlete with a basketball in his hands - either Michael Jordan or whatever. It's like guilty by association or in my case, by height. Everyone wants us to be like Mike. But like I said

Continued, next page.



Panel 7, continued:

earlier, I want people to see me for who I am. I'm intelligent, mature, and now serious about my education. I'm not some dumb athlete. I know they don't see me as a serious student. I don't think they see me at all. Perhaps when I get my degree, they'll see me then. - Wayne

Sound Bite: The perception is that blacks make good athletes, but poor scholars.” - Wayne

Illustration: Confronting Racial Stereotypes: Perceptions of the Black Male

Illustrative Panel 7 provides a visual interpretation of the personal narratives shared by Robert in which it was presumed that he played on the basketball team simply because of his physical characteristics - tall, physically attractive, athletic looking, and black. In this study, I do not wish to suggest or imply or suggest that African-American students do not have a difficult time adjusting to the academic demands and responsibilities of college life. Like many of their white counterparts, African-American

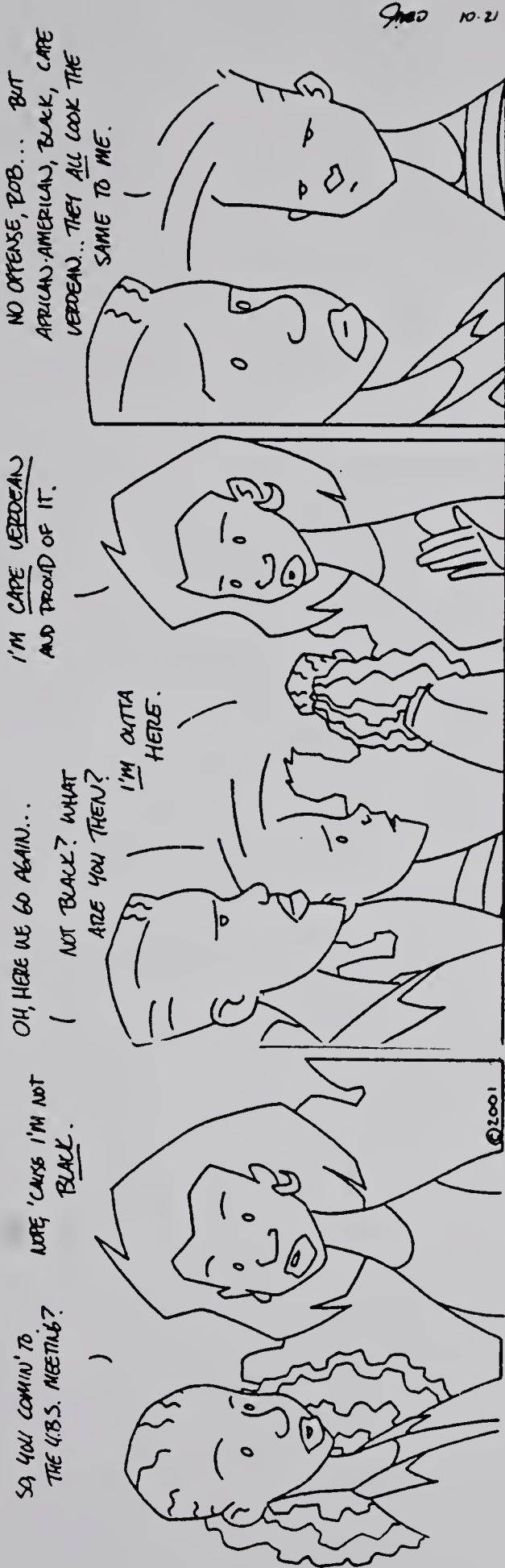
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Panel 7, continued:

students enter the UMass Dartmouth with varying levels of academic abilities, achievements, and commitments to degree completion.



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Panel 8: A Visual Interpretation: Racial Identity Development Among Black Students

Continued, next page.

Panel 8, continued:

Theme: Racial Identity Development and Social Interactions

Subject: Influence of Racial Identity Development on Social Interaction Among Students of Color

Research: In their book The Color Complex, Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) illustrate how attitudes about skin color, hair texture, and facial features influence the self-perceptions of African-Americans and their interpersonal relationships with members of their social environment. According to Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) “beneath a surface appearance of black solidarity lies a matrix of attitudes about skin color and features in which color, not character establishes friendships” (p. 1).

Findings: In this study, it was found that among African-American students, family values, attitudes, and expectations about racial identity complex experiences that significantly influence how students perceive their social integration and interactions with faculty, staff, and peers within the college environment.

Continued, next page.



Panel 8, continued:

Narrative: Since being in college, I have had the chance to meet many people from different countries. And that's one change or cultural experience that has made me feel very, very content with who I am. So I'm not afraid to acknowledge my African heritage. I know I'm Brazilian, but I also consider myself African-American 'cause I'm now here in the United States, and despite what God may think, our society still classifies people by race and the color of their skin.

Sound Bite: "My mother believed that Cape Verdeans and Portuguese people had a much easier time in life. So she didn't want me to be African-American. Instead, she wanted me to classify as either Cape Verdean or Portuguese." - Elizabeth

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Racial Identity Development Among Black Students

Continued, next page.

Panel 8, continued:

Illustrative Analysis: In a predominantly white college environment, the racial and cultural identities of African-American students are challenged constantly by perceptions and experiences of racism. In fact, many African American students who participated in this study perceive UMass Dartmouth as an institution where deep-rooted and hurtful stereotypes, omissions, and distortions of black history, and expressions of white superiority are evident throughout the campus environment. Equally painful, however, were experiences in which some African-American students were forced to question their ethnic identity, to try and understand internalized racism, and to confront definitions of “blackness” that students of color have imposed on one another. From the experiences that emerged from their perceptions about racial identity development, it was evident that many African-American and Cape Verdean students are in denial of their own blackness. In fact, because of the challenges that often come with being an African-American student in a white college environment, some black students are forced to question or even deny their own racial identity. Many of them prefer to identify as white, Cape Verdean, Portuguese, or any racial category not associated with the African Diaspora (see Panel 8).

Continued, next page.



Panel 8, continued:

The process of racial identity development in a predominantly white college environment can be a difficult experience for many African-American students because of the cultural prejudice they encounter from other students of color who are of diverse cultural heritage. This is particularly true for African-American students who seek to maintain their personal integrity and black identity while conforming to the demands and responsibilities of the campus community.

Throughout the qualitative narratives, many African-American students talked about the cultural prejudice that exists among students of color. They attribute this phenomenon to issues involving racial and ethnic identity development and the inability of African-American and Cape Verdean students to develop positive interpersonal relationships with each other.

It should be noted, however, that for most students of color issues involving racial identity development did not just appear once they enrolled at the university. In fact, as evident in the narrative profiles of

Continued, next page.

Panel 8, continued:

participating students, for many of them issues surrounding racial identity developed during childhood and were significantly influenced by their parents and the home environment in which they live.

Unfortunately, it is only when individual black students are confronted with a startling experience, like being in a predominantly white college environment for the first time, that they are forced to question their identity or to reinterpretate their initial views and beliefs about the black experience.





Continued, next page.

Panel 9: A Visual Interpretation: Letting Go – Reflections of Parental Support and Encouragement

Panel 9, continued:

Theme: Family Support and Encouragement

Subject: Understanding Students' Need for Independence

Research: In their book Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years, Coburn and Treeger (1997) provide a comprehensive exploration into the adjustment issues and concerns experienced by parents when their undergraduate student goes off to college. In their book, Coburn and Treeger explain that one of the most difficult transitional issues experienced by the parents, regardless of racial, cultural, or economic background, is the changing relationship they must now endure with their college students.

Findings: Consistent with the literature, the evidence suggest that individual and family background characteristics, previous college experiences, and expectations about future educational attainment significantly influence not only students' integration into the social life of the campus, but also their persistence and their commitment to degree completion.

Continued, next page.

Panel 9, continued:

- Narrative: I really wanted to live in a dorm. I didn't want to go home every day and listen to my mother complain about who I was going out with, what time I was coming home, or even to ask me to go to the grocery store. And I really didn't want to take care of my little brother. So eventually, I moved out and got my own apartment.
- Sound Bite: "My parents were really very protective of me, and I can appreciate their concerns. But, my goodness, I'm not a baby anymore." – Wanda
- Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Family Support and Encouragement
- Illustrative Analysis: For Wanda, the fact that her parents had a difficult time with the fact that she would be living in a culturally diverse campus environment was somewhat disturbing to her. Although Wanda loved her parents and sincerely appreciated their concern for her personal and educational development, the thought of moving out of their household, attending college far from home, and becoming independent of parental support were things she had always wanted to do. Unfortunately, both of

Continued, next page.



Panel 9, continued:

Wanda's parents, but especially her mother, had a difficult time letting go. Instead, they want to be involved in every aspect of Wanda's life, including helping her to choose a roommate and friends on campus (see panel 9). Perhaps Wanda's mother was influenced by her Jamaican background or simply her desire to ensure that Wanda adjusts successfully, both socially and academically, to the campus environment. In any case, Wanda's mother attended one of the freshman orientation programs, even though Wanda is not a freshman, just to investigate who Wanda would be sharing a room with during the academic year.

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I'M SERIOUS. SUPPOSE  
WANDA'S ROOMMATE IS...

DON'T SAY IT, I KNOW  
JUST WHAT YOU'RE  
THINKING, HON.

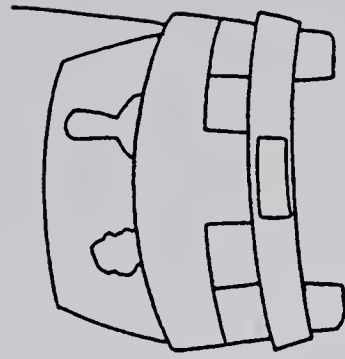
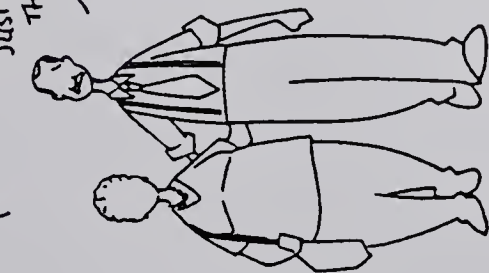
SO, WE'RE SUPPOSED TO  
GIVE HER UP TO STRANGERS?

NO, WE LET HER GROW UP  
LIKE MOST COLLEGE  
STUDENTS DO.

WELL, WHAT IF SHE  
DOESN'T NEED US ANYMORE?

MAGGIE, SHE'S A  
BIG GIRL NOW.

WHAT?



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Panel 10: A Visual Interpretation: Parents as a Resource for their Students

Panel 10, continued:

Theme: Family Support and Encouragement

Subject: Parents as a Resource

Research: In their research on family attachment and the psychological of well-being of racially and ethnically diverse first-year students, Kenny and Perez (1996) found that among African-American, Latino, and Asian American students, positive family attachment and support had a direct influence on students at a predominantly white college. They conclude that “as students leave home for college, the perceptions that they share a positive affective relationship with an important family member and are supported in their independent strivings appear more important to psychological well-being” (p. 532).

Findings: Consistent with the literature, the findings of this study suggest that individual and family background characteristics, previous college experiences, and expectations about future educational attainment significantly influence not only students’ integration into the social life

Continued, next page.



Panel 10, continued:

of the campus, but also their persistence and their commitment to degree completion.

Narrative: When I decided to change majors, my mother was very supportive. Like me, she's very artistic, and I have an older sister who's an architect. She's always been very supportive too. You know, mom has always kept copies of all our artwork. But Dad, he is more concerned with money. He would ask, "What kind of money are you going to make? Are you going to make enough money?" I think that was his greatest concern. But when I told him about my plans, he tried to be as supportive as he could. But I could tell that he was very disappointed. I reassured him that if he really is concerned about my happiness, he'd understand that majoring in art is what makes me happy. That's what I enjoy and that's what I do well in. Now he's totally supportive. I'm a sculpture major and I recently gave him some jewellery that I made in class. Now, he's behind me 100%. But, like I said, at first it was difficult for him to understand my decision.

Continued, next page.

Panel 10, continued:

Sound Bite: If all else fails, I know my family will be there for me.” - Della

Illustration: A Visual Interpretation: Parents as a Resource

Illustrative Analysis: In reading the qualitative narratives, it was quite obvious that for most of the African-American community college students who participated in this study, family support and encouragement were important factors influencing their personal educational development. From their elementary and secondary education to their decision to attend the college of their choice, the influence of parental support and encouragement was undeniable.

What was extremely interesting, however, was the number of African-American students who spoke passionately about the role of their mothers in helping them to negotiate the college selection, enrollment, and adjustment processes. In some cases, this phenomenon was the result of a single-parent household in which the father was absent, leaving the mother with sole responsibility of caring for the personal and

Continued, next page.

Panel 10, continued:

educational development of the student. Yet even when the father was present in the household, it appears that the mothers were most sensitive to the needs, concerns, and expectations of the student while providing support and encouragement when necessary.

Panel 10 provides a visual interpretation of the loving and caring relationship Wanda has with her parents. Although Wanda's parents divorced before the family moved to the United States, she and her mother have always been close. Additionally, Wanda's mother and step-father have always played an important role in Wanda's life, helping her to adjust to the demands and responsibilities of college life.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter was the researcher's attempt to provide a visual interpretation of the social perceptions and experiences described by students in their personal narratives. As noted in Chapter 4, this illustrative analysis revealed several emerging themes or central messages that influenced students' experiences of social integration in a predominantly white college environment.

To enhance the presentation of this analysis, story boarding was a "way to display coherence in the constitutive events of [student] experiences, to share the coherence [students have] expressed, and to link [students'] experiences to the" college



environment in a way that is more natural and realistic (Seidman, 1991, p. 92). This illustrative analysis of students' perceptions of social integration was also consistent with the demands of "some researchers who argue for less reliance on written words and more on graphs, charts, and matrices" or other methodologies that are illustrative (Seidman, 1991, p. 91).

While the narrative profiles developed through the in-depth interview process allowed students to tell their story in their own words, the story boards were an attempt to present a more realistic visual interpretation of students' social perceptions and experiences within the campus environment. The fundamental premise behind the development of story boards, as part of the data analysis process, is that "seeing is believing."

It should be noted, however, that these visual illustrations reflect the social perceptions of students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the "main characters." These students were identified as the main characters because of: 1) their level of involvement in campus social activities; 2) their detailed "information-rich stories" about the experience of becoming socially integrated into campus life; and 3) their willingness to assist in the process of developing the story boards.

Grouped thematically in Panels 1 through 10, the thematic connection between students' personal narratives and each of the panels reflected a meaningful and realistic experience of social integration in a predominantly white campus environment. Hopefully, the perceptions and experiences captured in these illustrations can assist predominantly white institutions in better understanding how African-American

students perceive, experience, and interpret their social integration within such an environment.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a regional university, UMass Dartmouth has always played a critical role in encouraging and supporting the educational aspirations of socially and economically disadvantaged students in southeastern Massachusetts. Of particular concern to the university's enrollment management team is the number of African-American students who continue to be disproportionately located at area community colleges.

Over the past several years, UMass Dartmouth has collaborated with area community colleges in the development of programs and services designed to strengthen student recruitment and outreach, ease student transfer and course articulation, and offer flexible academic programs to the adult transfer student populations. As a result, the numbers of African-American community college students that have transferred to the university has increased. Most of these students, however, have entered the university with various personal needs, academic concerns, and certain expectations about their transition into the campus social environment. Yet very little is known about the processes of interaction, within the campus environment, that determine how African-American community college transfer students perceive and experience social integration at the university. Nor do we know enough about how personal characteristics or previous college experiences influence their involvement in campus social activities once they matriculate at the university.

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of social integration of African-American community college transfer students at UMass Dartmouth. The



qualitative in-depth interviewing process that guided this study allowed 16 students to tell their stories about social integration. The data collected through the interviews were analyzed for emerging themes and patterns, compared to the literature, categorized to reflect students' social perceptions and experiences, and then presented using a novelistic format with each student assuming the position of storyteller.

As storytellers, the students revealed how their personal background characteristics, including family obligations, employment responsibilities, career aspirations, academic expectations, and degree commitment influenced their perceptions of social integration. Students also revealed how previous college experiences, perceptions of campus racism, and their sense of maturity influenced interpersonal interactions and the extent to which they became involved in campus social activities at the university.

The themes that emerged from students' perceptions of social integration were connected thematically and framed around the experiences of four students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the "main characters." The themes that emerged from the analysis of students' perceptions of the experience of social integration include the fact that:

- family values, attitudes, and expectations about racial identity are complex and significantly influence students' perceptions of their social integration and interactions with faculty, staff, and peers within the college environment.
- students' involvement in social activities is influenced by their previous college experiences, their expectations of campus life, and their perceptions of campus climate.

- positive classroom interactions help to connect students to their peers and their faculty while enhancing the process of social perceptions and social integration.
- student-faculty relationships influence both academic and social integration.
- neither black students or white students fully understand or appreciate the racial diversity and cultural differences that influence their social interactions.
- racial identity development and perceptions of racial identity continue to influence the social interactions and inter-group relations between African-American students interaction.
- cultural prejudice among African-American and Cape Verdean students was a common experience that impeded their ability to develop positive interpersonal relationships.
- for African-American students, the social and psychological adjustments associated with being in a predominately white university was a challenging experience that caused them to sometimes question their own abilities and beliefs about environmental supportiveness.
- for many students, the social and psychological adjustments that came with living with a white roommate were complicated by social values, family expectations, and the previous social experiences students brought to the campus environment.
- African-American students are confronted daily with racial and cultural stereotypes that negatively affect their social interactions throughout the campus environment.
- self-segregation is a strategy often used by black students to affirm their identity, their group solidarity, and their ability to cope with racial harassment.
- students perceived that the development of Unity House was the only one strategy that the university employed to address and support their social adjustment issues.

- because of their personal background and previous college experiences, black students were generally not interested in the traditional socialization activities that characterize the transfer orientation program.
- for African-American students, their ability to successfully adjust to racially stressful situations, within the campus environment, reflects their attitudes about racial identity, their perceptions of race related stressors, and their individual style of focusing on, coping with, or resolving race related problems.
- because they were numerically underrepresented, students often felt isolated, alienated, and even uncomfortable being the only person of color in certain academic and social situations.
- although the Unity House was perceived as a valuable campus resource for African-American students, students who actively participated in the programs and services provided through this department sometimes felt self-segregated from the majority students and disconnected from mainstream campus activities.
- despite the perception of not being fully integrated into the social community of the campus environment, African-American students expressed satisfaction with their educational experience at the university.
- perceptions of racism and incidents of racial discrimination were common experiences confronting African-American students.
- some of the students often had a difficult time approaching or interacting with white faculty members because of perceptions of racism.
- prior to enrolling at the university, most of the students had been socialized to expect and be prepared for racially hostile encounters within the campus environment.

Students were also encouraged to reflect on the meaning of their perceptions of the experience of social integration. As a result, their understanding, as told through compelling stories about structural, cultural, social, and psychological adjustment



issues, gave enormous power to the realities of campus life as perceived by African-American community college transfer students. The findings of this study are as follows:

- Among residents and commuter students, differences in perceptions of social integration were clearly evident. In particular, residential students perceived social integration as the development of peer relationships, establishing positive student-faculty relations, experiencing classroom satisfaction, and involvement in campus social activities. Residential students were much more eager to participate in clubs and organizations that were directly related to their major, their career aspirations, and/or their interest in promoting issues on social justice.
- Commuter students, often confronted with family obligations, employment responsibilities, religious obligations, and other external campus commitments, were limited in their time for extracurricular activities on campus. As a result, they perceived social integration as informal peer group associations, interacting with faculty, and involvement in the classroom.
- Perceptions of racism in the classroom, and throughout the campus environment, were a common theme revealed in the narratives of participating students. Whether such behavior was perceived as overt or covert racism, students felt that the consequences were basically the same -- the promotion of certain attitudes and ideas that subjected African-American students to hatred, discrimination, segregation,

hostility, and prejudice. In their attempt to resolve issues involving racism in the classroom, students were forced to be direct and persistent in addressing such perceptions.

- With respect to personal characteristics and experiences, the students who participated in this study were not homogeneous. In fact, they are extremely diverse in racial and cultural identity development, age, educational achievement, degree intent, family background, employment responsibilities, and previous college experiences. Despite their diverse background and experiences, most of them were clear about their educational intent and extremely confident in their ability to achieve their academic expectations and career aspirations. In addition, participating students felt that they received the necessary encouragement from family and/or significant others to continue their education at the collegiate level and to remain committed to degree completion.
- Students felt that institutional support programs were critically important in helping them to adjust socially within the campus environment and to establish social and interpersonal relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. Yet despite the numbers of support programs and systems available to students of color throughout the university community, most of the students who participated in this study felt a great sense of connectedness, validation, and even intimacy with only one of them, Unity House. These sentiments were consistently expressed throughout

students' narratives. Unfortunately, there were some students who perceive Unity House as an institution that encouraged African-American students to remain segregated within the university community.

- From students' narratives, it was evident that social interactions among African-American students were greatly enhanced because of Unity House and other social support systems available throughout the campus environment. These institutional support systems empowered students with a sense of cultural pride, racial identity, and black solidarity.
- Among participating students, it was generally believed that black solidarity on campus is sometimes threatened by the development of social cliques found within such affinity groups as United Brothers and Sisters (UBS), the Cape Verdean Student Association, and Sister-to-Sister. These cliques have been known to perpetuate attitudes and behaviors that encourage cultural prejudice, racial stereotypes, and even self-segregation among African-American students.
- For most students, racial identity played a critical role in their perceptions of social integration, their personal and academic development, and their interpersonal interactions within the campus environment. In fact, while some students continue to be challenged by personal conflicts over racial and cultural identity that developed during childhood, most are well beyond the encounter stage of self-awareness. They are self-confident, aware of the critical issues confronting students



of color in what one students described as a “racist” society, and assertive in their desire to work for social change, equality of opportunity, and diversity awareness.

- Students acknowledged that transfer orientation is a critical link in helping them to make a successful transition into the university community, to cope with negative perceptions of the campus environment, and to address developmental concerns involving self-esteem, social competence, and interpersonal relations. Yet most of them did not attend orientation. They cited conflicting schedules, personal commitments, and even the fact that they had attended orientation at their previous institution as factors that impeded their attendance at orientation.
- Living in what they perceive to be an “unfriendly and often indifferent college environment” was a difficult experience for some students. In fact, for most of the residential students, this experience had a negative impact on their interpersonal relationships and their social integration within the campus environment. Framed within a climate of racial hostility and cultural prejudice, it is understandable why some of them felt like strangers in a strange land.
- Students perceived students-faculty relationships to be more important than peer relationships or one’s involvement in campus social activities. In fact, students believed that faculty, particularly black faculty members, were critical in helping them to develop intellectual

competence, to establish educational purpose, to persist to the baccalaureate degree, and eventually to enroll in graduate school.

Unfortunately, because there are only a few black faculty members on campus, students felt that it was highly unlikely that white faculty would be willing to serve as their mentors, ensure their success and enjoyment in the classroom, or engage them in meaningful out-of-class experiences. Students also felt that the quality and strength of their relationship with white faculty did not promote intellectual development or a positive classroom experience.

- Within the classroom, students were often confronted with racial and cultural stereotypes. These behaviors challenged their self-perceptions, their intellectual ability, and their ability to develop mature interpersonal relationships with faculty and white students. While some students had a difficult time dealing with issues of racial and cultural stereotypes, most were able to remain self-confident and determined not to allow such behaviors to impact negatively their degree aspirations.
- Social interactions between black students and white students, particularly at parties and other social events where alcohol is consumed, represented a difficult experience for some students. Therefore, most tried to avoid being the only black student at such events for fear of being subjected to threatening racial situations, cultural prejudice, and even harassment. Additionally, some students refused to associate with

affinity groups, particularly those groups that encourage cultural prejudice among students of color.

- To survive the emotional and psychological difficulties in what Crystal characterizes as a “racially stressful environment,” participating African-American students had to develop a variety of personal and collective strategies. These strategies included: 1) oppositional behaviors which defied conformity to the normal academic and social expectations of the campus environment; 2) self-segregation from the dominant population; and 3) black separatism and an attempt to independently establish meaningful social activities or affinity groups that meet their personal needs.
- Many of the African-American students interviewed felt that, at times, self-segregation was a necessary strategy to survive in a hostile environment that denies them full membership in the university community.
- Because of the racial socialization process occurring within the family structure and home environment, the majority of the students who participated in this study expressed a positive sense of self while being well prepared for the racially hostile encounters normally expected by in a predominantly white college environment.



## Recommendations

Throughout the university community, there are those who would argue that the social support programs established for all students of color should be good enough for African-American community college transfers. Unfortunately, most community college transfers are not traditional 18-year-old college students, and they are not interested in getting involved in the kinds of social support systems or social activities normally designed to integrate freshmen into the college environment. As evident in this study, for many community college transfer students, perceptions and experiences of social integration are significantly influenced by various background characteristics, including personal and family obligations and previous college experiences.

As I reflect on the findings of this study, I am reminded of my personal commitment – to uncover background characteristics and previous college experiences that influence perceptions of social integration of African-American community college transfer students at a predominantly white university. The method of inquiry, which was a qualitative in-depth interviewing process, allowed participating students to reconstruct the details of their social experiences and to reflect on the meaning of that experience. The structure of the interviewing process also allowed students to be candid, honest, and real about their social perceptions and experiences at the university.

Throughout the interviewing process, I was able to develop a relationship with students based on trust, respect, and the belief that the findings of this study would result in a series of recommendations to enhance the quality of campus life for African-American community college transfer students. Therefore, to preserve the integrity of my relationship with participating students and the beliefs on which this research study

were established, I make the recommendation listed below. Although these recommendations seek to improving the quality of campus life for African-American community college transfer students at UMass Dartmouth, I sincerely believe that most four-year colleges and universities can benefit from the strategies and techniques recommended:

- Social interactions between faculty and African-American students outside the classroom should be encouraged.
- The faculty academic advisors should remain sensitive to the personal and educational needs of first-year African-American students.
- Faculty, administrative staff, and upper-class student leaders should make a sincere effort to assist African-American students to acquire appropriate attitudes and skills that encourage integrated into the academic and social communities of the campus environment.
- The faculty academic advising process should encourage student-faculty relationships and promote the intellectual development and personal growth of African-American students.
- The university should ensure the authenticity of the written and pictorial information published in its recruitment brochures so that students of color have a better understanding of the campus climate and the enrollment characteristics of the student body.
- The university must implement assessments initiatives (i.e. indept interviews, surveys, focus groups interviews, etc.) to ensure the existence of an integrated learning environment where students, particularly

African-Americans, feel included and involved in the classroom, able to express their views without being confronted with racial or cultural stereotypes, and confident that they will gain from their classroom experiences a sense of success and personal satisfaction.

- Self-segregation based on racial or cultural identification, athletic team affiliation, and even academic major appear to be the norm throughout the university community.
- While self-segregation is a strategy employed by African-American students in the face of difficult social adjustment issues, I recommend that they get involved in all aspects of campus life not just those activities and/or affiliations that characterize their ethnic background or social experiences.
- The university should implement learning communities, within the residential facilities, that enable faculty, and staff of diverse ethnic backgrounds to socialize and develop respect, understanding, and an appreciation for cultural differences.
- A one-credit orientation course that enables new students\_ to learn about racial identity development, interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, and group dynamics, should be offered.
- In the design and development of the transfer orientation program, care should be taken to consider the background and prior college experiences of participating students. Most of these students have specific academic



and career goals, a sense of purpose and direction, family commitments, and increased maturity.

- The university should explore the development of a peer mentoring program whereby upper-class African-American students, who are not orientation leaders, can be an important role in helping first-year students to adjust to the personal, social, and academic demands of college life.
- In this study, the development of story boards reflected the researcher's interpretation of the social experiences of African-American community college transfer students in a predominantly white college environment. Although there are various methodologies (i.e., seminars, workshops, advising sessions, etc.) that are successful at identifying, sharing, and addressing the social adjustment issues experienced of college students, I recommend that the university explore the possibility of continuing to explore the effectiveness of this methodology as part of the new student orientation process.

Finally, this research was limited to a study of the perceptions and experiences of social integration of African-American community college transfers students at UMass Dartmouth. While the experience of social integration is critically important to the retention and degree persistence of African American students at any predominantly white institution, it is not my intent to suggest that these students are more worthy of study. The integration of students into the academic and social communities at UMass Dartmouth must be a campus-wide concern. I, therefore, encourage further research

and the development of enrollment management initiatives that seek to bring about substantial improvements in the quality of campus life for all students, regardless of their racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, so that persistence to the baccalaureate degree can become a reality.

With the information gained from the in-depth interviewing process, UMass Dartmouth can better prepare other baccalaureate aspirants in the community college system who continue to be at risk of failing to fully participate in the system of higher education. The university can also use this information in the development of orientation programs and support services in meeting the needs and expectations of community college transfers, and in helping faculty and staff within the university community to understand the transfer experience.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED WRITTEN CONSENT FORM



## Informed Written Consent Form

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. This research project is part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how African-American community college transfer students perceive and experience their social integration at UMass Dartmouth, a predominantly white university. A second purpose of this study is to illustrate students' social perceptions through a technique known as storyboarding.

To complete this research project, I will have to interview you about your social experiences at UMass Dartmouth. This process will consist of two one-hour individual interview sessions. Although I do not foresee any risks to your participation in this project, I assure you that you have definite rights. You should know that your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. Therefore, you have the right to withdraw from the interview process at any time without any prejudice against you. You are also free to refuse to answer any questions raised during the interviews.

The interview sessions will be audio-taped and transcribed. Illustrations or storyboards will be developed from the transcribed tapes. These illustrations will be the researcher's attempt to provide a visual interpretation of the social perceptions and experiences of students who, for the purposes of this study, were identified as the "main characters."

Although every effort will be made to conceal your identity, by giving you a pseudonym, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. You should know, however, that your full name will not appear on any transcript or in the narrative report which will become part of my dissertation and shared with members of my doctoral committee. The information collected during your interview will not be used for any other purpose, including publication, without your prior consent.

I will be happy to furnish you with a copy of the audio tape, a transcript of your interview, or a copy of the narrative report. However, the completed dissertation will be filed with the University of Massachusetts Amherst and made available at the University Library.

If you have any questions concerning this research project, you can reach me at 334 Hawthorn Street, New Bedford, MA 02740, or by calling (508) 997-4236.

Sincerely,

Norman L. Barber

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand and agree to the above on \_\_\_\_\_.  
Student's Signature Date

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